DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 365 988 CS 214 164

AUTHOR Strickland, James, Ed.
TITLE English Leadership Quarterly, 1993.
INSTITUTION National Council of Teachers of English, Urbana, IL. Conference on English Leadership.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 66p.; For 1992 issues, see ED 355 533.
AVAILABLE FROM English Leadership Quarterly, National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096.
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT English Leadership Quarterly; v15 n1-4 Feb-Dec 1993

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS English Instruction; Higher Education; Integrated Activities; Journal Writing; *Literature Appreciation; *Parent Participation; Parent Teacher Cooperation; *Politics of Education; Reader Response; Readers Theater; Secondary Education; *Teacher Role; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Professional Concerns

ABSTRACT

These four issues of the English Leadership Quarterly represent those published during 1993. Articles in number 1 deal with parent involvement and participation, and include: "Opening the Doors to Open House" (Jolene A. Borgese); "Parent/Teacher Conferences: Avoiding the Collision Course" (Robert Perrin); "Expanding Human Resources: Trained Volunteers in the Writing Center" (Susan Benjamin); "Involving Parents" (Ruben Friedman); "Three Areas of Parental Concern: A Letter to the Superintendent" (David Roberts); "Partnership Planning: An Alternative Model" (William J. Gallagher); "The Paperless Class" (Randall E. Smith); and "How to Help Your Child become a Better Writer." Articles in number 2 deal with politics and change and include: "The Voices We Hear, the Pressures We Feel" (Jeff Golub); "Teaching Intentional Errors in Standard English: A Way to 'big smart english'" (Donald A. McAndrew and C. Mark Hurlbert); "Women and E-Mail: Issues of Gender and Technology" (Pamela Takayoshi); "A Pro-Choice Curriculum" (Carol Jago); and "'Macbeth' and Sense of Self" (Terrie St. Michel). Articles in number 3 concern teachers' professional role and include: "Tale One: Writing with a Writing Workshop" (Wendy Bishop); "Tale Two: Teacher Writing with a First-Year Writing Class" (Sandra Gail Teichmann); "Reaching Parents through Local Newspapers" (Carol Jago); "Struck by Lightning, Twice" (Jan Morgenstern); and "Journal Writing and Active Learning in College Art Classes" (William Murdick). Articles in number 4 concern a love of literature and include: "Reading Literature and Making Meaning" (Lee Williams); "Integrated Teaching: A Common Ground among Literature, Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies" (M. P. Cavanaugh); "By Heart: A Case for Memorization" (Carol Jago); "Contemporary Literature, Heterogeneous Style" (Eileen Oliver); "Integrating Personal and Literary Response" (Rick Chambers); "The Book or the Movie?" (Janine Rider); "Turning Short Stories into Readers' Theater" (Gerald Grunska); and "The Day the Textbook Evaluators Came to Town" (Beverly Haley). (RS)

ED 365 988

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

1993

James Strickland, Editor

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*Leadership for Excellence*

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

**Conference on English Leadership**

Volume 15, Number 1
February 1993
Guest Editor: Lela M. DeToye

## In This Issue

### PARENT INVOLVEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

by Lela M. DeToye, guest editor
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

Partnerships are a way of life. They are basic to involvement and participation in any setting. Our histories, whether thinking in personal or corporate terms, are built on collaborations, compromises, contracts—partnerships that make life complicated, but infinitely more interesting.

In the realm of education, partnerships have formed the baseline for how work is accomplished in schools. Schools enter into partnerships with various levels of government to fund and secure schooling efforts. Deals are struck and partnerships are formed between teachers, school boards, and community representatives to establish an agreed upon curriculum. Parents form partnerships with schools for the education of their children. And at the very ground level, an essential partnership must exist between teachers and students to create an environment where learning can take place.

Yet, even with this rich and deep history of educational partnerships, a bright future for education will depend on even greater cooperation between the various levels of education, between teachers and parents, schools and communities, and between the classroom and the burgeoning world of high tech.

Educational journals are filled with articles urging the formation of learning and literacy communities as a prerequisite for student achievement. In this age of economic belt tightening, where the quality of education must rely on the largess of a tax-weary populace, schools are vitally concerned with building a positive base of support in the local community. Universities are seeking cooperative liaisons with schools to provide appropriate inservice and preservice education. Where do leaders in English language arts fit into this complex, but necessary, network?

This was the premise and the question I had in mind when I first proposed this issue of *English Leadership Quarterly*. Parental support and involvement seemed a natural starting point for developing educational partnerships aimed at higher student achievement and better school-community relations.

The first group of articles in this issue proposes new ways to involve parents in the education of their children, especially the part of their education that takes place in the English classroom. In most cases student writing forms the link between teachers and parents—and what a powerful link that can be. Out of her dislike for open houses, Jolene A. Borgese has developed an "open house survival activity." Her "dear parent" letters are an excellent way to put parents and teenagers in touch with one another. Her English classroom provides the environment for this rich writing activity, but it is the parent writing that charges it with emotion. Despite some reluctance from her faculty, Susan Benjamin opened the doors of her writing center to community volunteers. Her article describes successful recruiting and training strategies, as well as ways to integrate these trained tutors into the writing program. The risk she took in involving community members in her writing lab was well worth it.

Parent/teacher conferences are a fact of school life. Yet, for the most part, parents and teachers alike approach them with some trepidation. Robert Perrin, parent, teacher, and teacher educator,

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draws on his wide-ranging experience to propose a series of recommendations to make parent/teacher conferences more productive.

Ruben Friedman offers two simple but effective methods to involve parents in the English education of their children. He entices their support of process writing by offering an informative workshop modeling the process. Then, he ensures their support by holding a "read in" where students share a successful written product with a parent audience.

What can be done when parental support is not forthcoming? Sometimes an informed observer can provide a perspective on a conflict between teachers and parents that can lead to meaningful dialogue. In David Roberts' letter to the superintendent, parent concerns are acknowledged, but at the same time, teachers are supported for their informed view of a hot educational topic.

A second group of articles focuses on ways to successfully initiate partnerships. William J. Gallagher's article proposes a new way to proceed with a cohort group on curriculum development. It starts with the activities of the classroom rather than a philosophy of education or a set of written objectives.

Randall E. Smith's article illustrates how the computer can be the connector for partnerships among teachers and between teachers and the university. Computer networks and electronic-mail in "The Paperless Class" motivate and facilitate the development of meaningful partnerships.

## OPENING THE DOORS TO OPEN HOUSE

by Jolene A. Borgese
East High School
West Chester, Pennsylvania

I hated open house. As a novice teacher I dreaded the questioning and scrutinizing by parents, but as a seasoned teacher I have realized that parents are only interested in their child, not what the teacher has to say about the entire class. With the help of my Writing Project colleague, Rosemarie Montgomery, I have developed an "open house survival activity." I no longer hate open house; on the contrary, I welcome and am warmed by the interaction that occurs between parent and child as they share their thoughts in "open house" letters.

Rosemarie originally suggested the following "open house" assignment: have students write letters to their parents describing their English class, their teacher's methods, and the course requirements. These letters would then be delivered to parents when they attended the open house and form the base for a general discussion. In addition to the letters, I had students enclose copies of the course syllabus, which many parents never would have seen, despite their interest in what we planned to read and write in class. Because I was teaching seniors, and many parents did not actually attend open house, I mailed all letters not picked up that evening. I also duplicated some letters to accommodate parents living in separate households.

Even seniors who seemed to have "senioritis" during the first week of school were motivated enough to write these "dear parent" letters because of the extra credit points they would receive if their parents responded. Some even admitted that the extra credit points were the reason they wrote the letters.

> Dear Parents,
> This class is very exciting. I really look forward to coming to this room every day. Though lets get serious . . . Would you please write me back . . . it is worth twenty-five points extra credit.
> Love, Victor

The September evening of my first letter-writing open house, I watched the parents read their children's letters. They were obviously moved, but I wasn't aware of the impact of these letters until I read the parent responses. Especially touching were letters from busy fathers to their daughters.

> Dear Jenna,
> This year has been emotionally draining on all of us. My changing job status, family illness, schooling, event coordination, and different supervising have greatly altered our personal lifestyles...I love you and can't wait to be able to spend more time with you.
> Love, Dad

Another dad wrote:

> Dear Bridget,
> . . . Meanwhile have fun while growing into the woman I know you'll be. Don't ever forget I was there from the beginning.
> Love forever, your Dad

Some letters were filled with a great deal of sentiment and poignancy about their "babies" growing up and about having their last open house behind them.

> Dear Rob,
> We enjoyed our last open house after 15 years . . . It is going to be hard next Fall as you start college. It will be a wonderful experience for you but very hard on your parents emotionally. What ever college you attend, we both support you. We do love you . . .
> Love Mommy and Daddy

I shared some of these letters with the class. When a letter seemed too personal or potentially embarrassing, I asked the student for permission, which wasn't always granted. In those cases I read the letter, gave credit, and returned it to the student. For example, Tim asked me not to share his mother's letter.

> Dear Tim,
> It was so nice of you to write me a letter. It was very interesting to hear your views on your English class . . . I remember my favorite English teacher, Miss Baker. She made the class fun. The best part was when we had literature, as you know I still love to read . . . It's hard for me to believe that my baby is a senior and looking forward to college. Seems like only yesterday that you were starting off to kindergarten.
> With love, Mother

This year I repeated the assignment but with a new purpose and a new attitude. I am teaching three tenth-grade honors English classes and decided that all writing assignments would be completed in the computer lab at school. I started the letter writing activity by telling my students how special letters are as compared to phone calls. Then I shared the story of my mother's letters written to me while I was at college five hours away from home.

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*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

She wrote instead of calling because money was too limited to make long-distance calls. Now these letters are a part of my history and reveal what life was like during my college years. I also emphasized that I saved the letters as artifacts from that period of my life, pieces of my legacy.

While my students prewrote with pencil and paper and then moved to the computer to compose and revise, I could see that writing as a process was alive and well at East High School. I was hoping with this new approach that my students' letters would be more personal and poignant, but I was disappointed. The students' letters were to the point, met the requirements, were typed and saved effortlessly on the Apple 2e's, including the fact that if their parents responded to their letters, they would receive extra credit. Jay wrote:

> Dear Mom and Dad,
>
> Hi, how are you? In your quest to see all my teachers, Ms. Borgese is your first stop. Due to bad directions you missed her last year. As your homework assignment you are to write me back. For that letter I will receive !!25!! extra credit points. They are really helpful for grades.
>
> Jay

And Mackenzie echoed:

> Dear Mom,
>
> So far in English class we have started to read a book, *Bless the Beast and the Children.* Miss Borgese is my teacher. She's OK. She puts us in groups and lets us work together . . . Your assignment is to write a response to me. If you do I will receive 25 extra credit points.
>
> Love Mackenzie

Despite these rather superficial student letters, again the parents' letters were rich with emotion, stories, advice, and voice. I found parents writing to their teenagers as though they were adults.

> Dear Jack,
>
> I was struck by your thoughts on education and the enjoyment and challenge you find in it . . . It is also important that you understand the difference between "going to school" and "learning" . . . Keep up the good work but don't forget to challenge yourself, your understanding, and your teachers.
>
> Much love, Dad

At the end of the two-week response period, I had a 98% return from either one or both parents—most often it was *both.* Two students received letters from absent fathers, who were happy to be included in their children's school lives.

> Dear Maria,
>
> It was great to receive your recent letter . . . I know that I am not always there when you need me. I try to be there as much as possible . . . Your biggest Fan.
>
> Love Dad.

> Dear Bonnie,
>
> Just now, I received your letter . . . It is rather fun and light hearted to be part of your schoolwork. Tucson, Arizona, is a dry and brown area except in the rainy season . . . My work is going slower than I had expected . . . I'll be home for sure by December 15 and hopefully in November by way of business . . . Till then I love you.
>
> Dad

One student received a letter from her single mother, commenting on how proud she was of her daughter's accomplishments.

> Dear Anne,
>
> . . . Being the "baby" has made you strong. You have seen problems and answers in other lives before they reach your own life. Take advantage of this way of learning and you will have the ability to handle any situation with care and maturity. Stay just the way you are and you will always be a good person. I am proud of you.
>
> I love you, Mommy

In many cases, however, the lack of communication between my students and their parents was all too clear.

> Dear Jamie,
>
> . . . It seems as though you have a great misunderstanding of what a woman's role is in life. Men and women should be partners not competitors. They need to support one another and work together to accomplish their goals. We all have our strengths and weaknesses . . . Now that you understand the true facts of life, dearest Jamie, I know that your studies and outlook on life will take a turn for the better.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> your loving Mother (the woman behind your dear Dad)

As a result of this activity I found myself doing exactly what I urged my students to do—being reflective. What did I think? What did I learn from this experience? How did reading these letters change my thinking? Reflecting on this experience, I realize that I learned more than my students did. They saw it as an easy 25 points and their teacher's way out of open house; I saw it as my way in. I experienced the power writing has when the audience and writer have a clear message, share love, and respect each other. Perhaps the parents learned the most from this open house activity—and isn't that what open houses are all about? Amy's mother, for example, realized and acknowledged her daughter's growing maturity in her letter.

> Dear Amy,
>
> . . . There was something in your letter that made me really proud. Your perception about other people's feelings and needs and your observing what helps them is absolutely terrific. That shows a side of you, your concern for people not as "bubbly" as you, which I am particularly happy to see. Good job! Keep it up. It is a value worth promoting . . . Write back some time. We can practice for when you go away to college.
>
> Love, Mom

Now that I understand the power of parental involvement, I am taking the next step to include parents even more in my classroom activities. I have long struggled with trying to develop a community of writers and readers among my students; now I see the need to include their parents in this community. To continue developing this line of communication, I suggest that my students ask a parent or other relative to be one of their response partners when working on a piece of writing. This further enhances and opens the lines of communication between teens and their parents, helping parents become part of their children's literacy community. As one parent put it:

> Dear Kerri,
>
> . . . I find it interesting to write to you because sometimes we forget to say things every day that are important. We attribute this to our very busy schedules. When we put it on paper we have a chance to say what is in our hearts. I want to say that I am very proud of you in every way. . . .
>
> I love you, Mommy

## PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES: AVOIDING THE COLLISION COURSE

by Robert Perrin
Indiana State University at Terre Haute

> Mrs. Anderson wants to meet with you to discuss Mike's progress in your course.

So reads a note I found in my staff mailbox twenty-two years ago, when I was teaching high school English in a suburb of St. Louis. It heralded my first parent/teacher conference as a first-year teacher.

As I walked to the teachers' lounge, note in hand, I tried to sort out what had prompted the request for a conference. Mike was a pleasant student, bright and hard working, with a solid B in my sophomore English class. He was never testy (as some sophomores were), and we got along well. Everything was fine, I thought. But the request for a conference rattled me. I tried to approach the thought of a conference positively: "Wasn't it nice that a parent wanted to talk about her son's school work?" But I was still unnerved. You see, during student teaching, I had only one parent/teacher conference, and my supervising teacher had dominated the hour, and the parent had acquiesced without hesitation. That experience had given me no grounding whatsoever for my first discussion with a parent. Much to my relief, the conference with Mike's mother ended up being an easy one, a discussion of ways she could enhance Mike's learning outside the classroom. It was a breeze—a reprieve. Certainly, that conference did not prepare me for the wave of sometimes edgy, sometimes down-right combative conferences that were to follow during my subsequent years of teaching. In the years since, I have thought intermittently about parent/teacher conferences—mostly when I've had one as a parent or as a teacher. Then, once they were over, I forgot about them. But finally, after a particularly unpleasant conference this year, it became apparent to me that we, as educators, should do more than we have done to help ensure that these conferences are productive, that they serve to link parents and teachers in their efforts to improve students' educational experiences. To ground my discussion, let me provide some facts. I am an English educator, with varied teaching experience—seven years in public schools and fifteen in state universities; I currently teach courses for English education majors and minors. I am the parent of an eighteen-year-old college freshman and a nine-year-old third grader. I have had one hundred or so conferences with parents (both while teaching high school and while teaching college) and at least fifteen conferences with my children's teachers (some good and some bad). These facts—and the mixed experiences they have provided me—contribute to my writing this article. Because every time a parent calls to request a conference or every time I feel the need to call to request one, I have misgivings about the nature of the parent/teacher conference as a means of involving parents in the educational process.

Yet these misgivings can be eliminated if we would consider some strategies that can improve our chances of success with parents and will draw them, ever so slightly, into a better working relationship with teachers, and as a result with the schools.

### Establish Departmental or School-Wide Conference Procedures

As obvious as this first recommendation seems, it is not common. Schools and departments have attendance procedures, grading procedures, registration procedures, disciplinary procedures, and innumerable other procedures; however, I have never worked in or with a school or department that had established carefully thought-out conference procedures. Developing consistent, departmental or school-wide patterns for parent/teacher conferences is necessary, however, and it will benefit everyone. But such uniform procedures will not materialize without effort. Teachers, administrators, and parents (perhaps representatives from parent/teacher organizations) should explore possibilities and establish a framework for conferences. Addressing such issues as when, where, and under what circumstances to meet can go a long way toward ensuring that conferences are equitably handled. The larger benefit is that neither parents nor teachers would be placed in contexts that can, unfortunately, spiral out of control. Uniform procedures can make everyone more secure. (Subsequent points provide details that should be included when establishing school- or department-wide procedures.)

### Establish a Wait-Period for Conferences

The circumstances that initiate many conferences are negative: students get lower grades than they and their parents want, students' behavior has gotten out of control, and so on. These kinds of highly-charged circumstances create a great deal of tension, both for parents and teachers. We all know that.

To ensure that such tension is controlled, we need to arrange conferences at least a day or two after the original incident or initiating circumstance. Such a "wait time" is extremely helpful because it allows parents and teachers to think—and think for quite a while—before they speak. Common sense suggests the advantage of this pattern.

### Have Both Parents and Teachers Prepare

For parent/teacher conferences to serve their most positive purposes, all parties must be actively involved. So often teachers come to conferences with gradebooks, coursework, and student folders in hand and, in a sense, dominate the discussions because they have the most evidence. Parents, who in many instances have come to complain, may as a result feel overwhelmed and possibly defensive. A much more effective and positive strategy is to ask parents to prepare for the conference as well: prepare a list of specific questions to ask or points to discuss. Such a list will allow them to share in establishing the "agenda" for a conference; if teachers can respond to the questions, rather than inundate parents with information, parents will feel that their concerns have been addressed in a genuine fashion. They may not always like the results, but they will have results.

### Make Neutral Arrangements for Discussions

The places where conferences occur are, to an extent, "loaded" in the teacher's favor; after all, parents must enter the teacher's environment—his or her teaching domain—and schools, unfortunately, often seem alien to many parents. As teachers, we cannot alter this basic fact, but we can make accommodations. The best arrangement, it seems to me, is to meet in a conference room, rather than a classroom. However, if we must meet with parents in our classrooms, we must break down boundaries. At one conference I attended, the teacher sat at her desk (that notable position of authority), while I sat in a student's desk. It was somewhat demeaning and ultimately infuriating. Other teachers have handled this situation better by joining me in a student's desk or by sitting with me at a table. Such arrangements may seem minor, but they can have a major impact on the dynamics of a conference. Parents who feel they are being treated as equals will, in most instances, be more responsive—and certainly less defensive.

### Make Sure the Conference Is Private

We must, at all costs, ensure that conferences are private, not public. Nothing interferes with a conference more than having people—other teachers, students, administrators, or support staff—drift in and out of the room while a parent and teacher are talking. As teachers, we are used to such interruptions, and they seldom break our rhythms; however, parents may not be accustomed to such distractions and may, consequently, become somewhat disoriented or unnerved. The necessity for privacy is all the more reason for conferences to be held in a central conference room, rather than a classroom. I know. The last time I had a conference with one of my son's teachers, we met in her room. As I left the conference, I saw three or four of his friends in the hall outside the room. The "what was your dad doing at school" questions that surely followed did nothing to ease the tension that had necessitated the meeting in the first place.

### Avoid the Impression of "Tag-Teaming" Parents

When possible, avoid having additional school personnel join in an initial conference, or make it clear from the start that other people (counselors, vice-principals, or deans) will be present. Parents may feel that school personnel are in collusion, siding against the student and parent in these instances—and far too often they are correct in this assumption. Such a perception, even when it isn't justified, can tilt a conference toward the negative. At times, of course, several people must be present, but a simple statement like "I'll ask your daughter's counselor to join us" will help to ensure that parents will not be caught off guard. They will know to whom they will be talking, and that will allow them to prepare themselves for the discussions.

### Be as Positive as Possible

As difficult as it will sometimes be, teachers should emphasize the positive in conferences, even conferences that have been initiated by negative circumstances. Nothing could—or should—make a parent more defensive that listening to a litany of "offenses" perpetrated by their children, yet that is often how teachers seem to handle conferences. Rather, teachers should note students' strengths and suggest that behavior problems, erratic attendance, shoddy work, and so on are unnecessary and inappropriate interferences with the students' success in the class. Common sense dictates that we acknowledge that our audience in these conferences—our students' parents—may become defensive if we fail to recognize their needs and interests as parents.

### Discuss Solutions with Parents

To some extent, the airing of grievances—on both the parents' and teachers' parts—is healthy. Articulating concerns, as we know, releases frustrations and makes other people aware of specific concerns that may not have occurred to them. There is basic value in that. Yet, "getting it out in the open" is not all that is necessary if we truly want to resolve difficulties. Problem solving requires that both parents and teachers consider alternative solutions together, discuss their respective benefits, and settle upon the one or ones most likely to produce positive results. Predetermined plans of action by either parents or teachers will not, in all likelihood, produce equitable solutions; a dialogue between parents and teachers is crucial if we are to succeed.

Conventional wisdom has long asserted that when parents are interested enough in their children's progress to request a conference, we have them on our side: they are committed to their children's education, and that commitment will be beneficial. But as teachers we have grown justifiably leery of this "conventional wisdom," because we know that parental involvement may be positive or negative, helpful or intrusive, useful or disruptive. But confer we must.

As teachers, we are expected to confer with parents on a regular basis—essentially whenever they ask—and yet we have little training and only the sketchiest advice on ways to proceed. Most of us, over the years, have simply relied on "being ourselves," sharing the information we have, and hoping for the best. Sometimes our conferences work out just fine; sometimes they do not. However, if we institute more systematic procedures for parent/teacher conferences, we will go a long way toward establishing partnerships with our students' parents and increase our chances of success. But at the very least, these improved strategies will help us avoid the collision course that many conferences seem to follow.

## EXPANDING HUMAN RESOURCES: TRAINED VOLUNTEERS IN THE WRITING CENTER

by Susan Benjamin
Highland Park High School, Illinois

A few years ago I presented an idea to colleagues and administrators at Highland Park High School that raised a few eyebrows. I thought that, in addition to training talented juniors and seniors to help their peers in the writing process, we could also train talented members of our adult community. Expressions of concern included, "You don't want to get parents involved too closely. They'll share their opinions loudly about curriculum and instruction. They will get too close to the students. They will confuse the students with non-professional advice."

Despite shared concerns, members of the English department and I wondered, "Why not take a risk and ask community members if they would like to help out in the Writing Center? If having a drop-in Writing Lab open nine periods a day staffed by teachers and a paraprofessional is a good idea, then is providing more trained helpers a better idea? If taking our students through the writing process enhances students' thinking, would it also enhance their parents' and other adults' thinking skills? If we trained adult community members, could they work harmoniously in tandem with us? Could we tap into the talents and experiences of members of our community to provide a real audience during various stages of the writing process? Would community members be able to help students communicate well?" As we enter our fourth year of training and integrating writing tutors, I can say that the answer to all of the preceding questions is a resounding "Yes." Through training adult community members and students together, we can expand our human resources to help students write better.

### Recruiting Volunteers

In order to expand the use of human resources, the first step is to find them. Our training program takes place over the summer, with selected junior and senior students, in addition to adult volunteers. A number of vehicles serve as effective recruiting possibilities.

Similar to other schools, we have eighth-grade parent and student orientation programs. During these programs, as part of my welcome on behalf of the English department, I tell parents that they are entering an exciting new world of educational possibilities as their children begin freshman year. If they sign up for our summer workshop, they can learn, practice and help their children succeed in writing "the Highland Park way." If they successfully complete our workshop, which virtually everyone who enters does, they will become "certified" to serve as writing coaches in our Writing Lab. The thought of learning with their children and of being trained to help students in a skilled, academic way appeals to many parents who enlist in the program.

Another way to attract participants is through local media. In our PTO newsletter and our community newspaper, we put out the call for volunteers. In this manner, the pool of applicants includes more than current parents. A number of adult non-parents, including senior citizens, also participate.

The final way to recruit volunteers is through word-of-mouth. Now that we are in our fourth year of the program, volunteers tend to tell other potential volunteers how much fun and how gratifying working in the Writing Lab can be. Occasionally we get blind calls from community members asking how they can become involved in the writing program.

### Training the Volunteers

Our training takes place in a two-session summer workshop. Typically another English teacher, the Writing Lab manager, and

I will train approximately 30 volunteers: 15 adult community members and 15 specially recommended (by their English teachers) juniors and seniors. In the training session, all members (students and adults) are treated as equals who can make a variety of worthwhile contributions.

After initial introductions and an overview about the purposes and functions of the Writing Lab, our first activity serves as an icebreaker and discussion springboard for what constitutes a good writing conference. In an eight-minute videotape, we show a ridiculously bad conference (the tutor grabs the student's pen and criticizes the student mercilessly, among other behaviors) and an excellent conference in which the coach gently brainstorms with the student to help the process evolve. Using the videotape as a catalyst for discussion, group members compare and contrast elements of productive versus nonproductive writing conferences. The video helps us to do what good writers do well: we show, as opposed to tell, the process.

The next activities include explaining (with handouts) what the job of a writing coach entails. A writing coach serves primarily as a question-asker and brainstorming partner. After providing a number of sample strategies, trainees are given an opportunity to practice writing and to help coach one another through the process. With instruction and guidance participants practice each step of the process, from prewriting clustering to suggestion-giving and receiving at the end of the first draft stage. Through practice new coaches learn which open-ended questions yield thoughtful responses and which questions lead to dead ends. When the whole group meets together to discuss the process, we (the leaders) try to model positive responses. We accept a variety of responses and try not to be overly prescriptive or judgmental.

During the second session we take participants through our writing program, from narrative to analytic to comparison/contrast papers. After explaining the basics of the program, we divide the group into groups of four with each small group containing two adults and two students. In the small groups, participants construct a comparison/contrast outline or draft about intergenerational issues. Frequently we find that this assignment creates a bonding experience, where members of two generations work together to create and present a common product.

### Integrating New Coaches into the Program

At the close of the second session, we pronounce all participants "certified." Our Writing Lab manager, a highly skilled, efficient paraprofessional, contacts all new coaches in August and constructs a schedule. Most adult coaches volunteer one to two hours per week; some insist on giving more time. Students give two to three periods per week, during free periods. The Writing Lab manager assigns coaches to students who have dropped in for help. With teachers' assistance she clarifies varied assignment expectations. Coaches brainstorm with students and provide suggestions. At the end of each session coaches initial the students' paper so that teachers know that students have received help in the Writing Lab.

Two thorny issues often surface at the beginning of a tutor's tenure: How can tutors help students with responses to literature when they haven't read (or re-read) the book, and what if tutors give advice with which the student or teacher disagrees? Our responses to these questions may sound simplistic, but they work. When writing a response to literature, the student must explain points well enough so that an inexperienced reader will understand. The coach's advice is just that: advice. The student can choose to take the advice or to make other decisions. The responsibility for the quality of the paper rests with the student. The evaluative contract remains between the student and teacher.

### Multiple Benefits

To date we have received much positive feedback from students, teachers, and adult coaches about the program. Students are grateful for the extra accessibility of trained individuals to help with writing; teachers are grateful for extra audiences for their students' writing; and volunteers are grateful for the opportunity to assist the academic program in a meaningful way.

Each year I receive a number of phone calls and notes from volunteers thanking me for the opportunity to be part of the Writing Lab program. In addition to being a valuable resource and helping students to write better, our volunteers are particularly vocal in their support of the program. They like the substance of the composition assignments, and they are impressed by how hard English teachers work when they have the opportunity to see them "up close." The partnership of parents and teachers working together to help students communicate well has increased positive public relations of the school in our community. As we enter an age of expanding technological resources that include computers with varied writing programs, I hope that we never lose sight of our most valuable resource in helping students to write well: other people. I believe that every community has adults with the breadth of knowledge and experience who can serve as perceptive audiences for student composition. By training community members and allowing them to assist in a meaningful, substantive way, we can truly expand our human resources and our community of learners.

Note: Susan Benjamin is the English Department chairperson at Highland Park High School in suburban Chicago. She has also served as a Member-at-Large on the CEL Executive Board, and is currently the Nominations Chair. Susan would like to acknowledge Mark Larson, English teacher, and Jean Nussbaum, Writing Lab manager, for their excellent work in training writing tutors.

## INVOLVING PARENTS

by Ruben Friedman
Plainedge High School
North Massapequa, New York

"More than 30 years of research, conducted by such experts as Yale child psychiatrist James Comer and others strongly suggests that where parents are involved, children learn and retain more" (*Teacher.* May/June 1992, 17). Parental involvement is so important in education, yet we only talk about it, then forget it, or, if we do remember, we don't know how to involve parents. I have used the following two "events," both of which have been very successful in involving parents in the writing education of their children.

As Supervisor of English, I invited parents to attend a workshop about the writing process. Its purpose was to explain the process so that parents would understand what their students were doing in their English classes. Furthermore, I wanted to show parents how what we're doing now is different from when they went to school. In addition, I wanted parents to be actively involved, so I taught them various prewriting techniques and had them use these techniques in the workshop. Letters were sent out inviting the parents to attend one of two ninety-minute sessions. Included with the letter was an NCTE brochure for parents titled "How to Help Your Child Become a Better Writer." [Editor's note: We have reprinted this brochure at the back of this newsletter.] Parents needed simply to call my secretary to RSVP, and they needed only to bring a pen or pencil. At the session, I distributed a handout describing several prewriting techniques. The first time I presented the workshop, about 40–50 people attended, including a number of board members, some of whom shared their prewriting with the group. The district public-relations woman took pictures that were later printed in the district newsletter, along with a brief article. The second year, I asked two teachers to help me present the workshops. Both times, I asked parents to write brief evaluations, and the evaluations were quite positive. Some parents indicated that there was not enough time. I followed this up with a questionnaire sent to parents asking them what additional workshops they would prefer in the future. A second successful "event" involving parents can be replicated easily by classroom teachers. I was teaching a ninth-grade GA (General Academic-below average) class. I distributed a list of creative openings for stories from Chris Van Allsburg's *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick.* I exhibited the clever drawings in the book and told students to select a story opening. We proceeded to the computer room where students learned the writing process and the use of the computer. After word processing a number of rough drafts on the computer, students submitted two copies of their final drafts. I photocopied copies of their stories and one student in each class designed covers for booklets. I laminated the covers, punched holes in everything, collated the pages and produced booklets. In the interim, I mailed letters to parents asking them to attend school to hear their children read their stories. In addition, I asked for parent volunteers to contribute coffee, cookies, and soda. In class, students practiced reading their stories aloud. On the chosen evening, we sat in a circle in the high school board room, both students and parents, munching on cookies, drinking soda and listening, as even some of the most recalcitrant students read their stories. The principal and one of the board members were in attendance. Although some students refused to attend and read, those who read did a great job. I gave extra credit and a certificate to all students who attended and read. In speaking to parents (and students) at the end of the evening, I found that everyone felt that this second event, "Young Writers Reading," was worthwhile and should be repeated. Parents said they were now better able to understand their children's writing processes and better able to help them. The students' final drafts of stories were probably the best pieces of writing they had ever written, and the parents who attended attested to the fact that they were quite impressed by the program. They felt it should be done more often. These are just two techniques that might be replicated to further involve parents. Any successful educational program hinges on informed and involved parents. They are our greatest allies in the process of education.

## THREE AREAS OF PARENTAL CONCERN: A LETTER TO THE SUPERINTENDENT

by David H. Roberts
Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama

Editor's note: Sometimes partnerships with parents and others are difficult to forge because the two groups are working from different sets of beliefs and concerns. The following letter from an observer of a parent/teacher conflict over grammar instruction attempts to level the playing field so that a truly meaningful dialogue about curriculum change can take place. A similar tactic could be employed for other "touchy" subjects.

Dear Superintendent,

I have given some thought to the issue of grammar instruction at the junior high, as you requested following the meeting of a group of parents and teachers held last week.

### Three Categories of Parental Concern

I noted 22 comments from the group of 200 or so parents, and I have divided the comments into three categories: concerns about pedagogy, concerns about content, and concerns about changes in our society. The first two concerns grow out of the third, I believe. The argument the parents have with the English department is a classic struggle between the familiar and the unfamiliar, between the old paradigm and the new (Hairston 1982). Without trivializing the parents' concerns, I side with the teachers in this dispute because they are informed professionals. Similar objections to both pedagogy and the content have been raised time and time again across the country and in other nations, and they have been answered each time, in strong terms: "There is no research evidence that grammar—as traditionally taught in the schools—has any appreciable effect on the improvement of writing skills" (Meckel 1963).

#### *Concerns about Pedagogy; or, "That's not the way I was taught"*

"Writing-as-process approaches are well documented and widely accepted as effective means of teaching and learning writing and associated language skills" (Emig 1971; Rose 1984; Strickland 1984). We know that writing is a recursive process, not a linear act (Perl 1983; Smith 1981), and that teaching general composing strategies is both time-consuming for the teacher and effective for the student (Murray 1980; Smagorinsky 1991). We also know that real writers draft and spend time correcting mistakes, as opposed to writing perfect copy on the first try (Murray 1968). Decades of research on writing answer the parents' questions about pedagogy with a strong affirmation of teaching writing through workshops, individual conferences, peer collaboration, and response groups (Freedman 1992). In other words, the research clearly shows that the conventions of Edited American English (what laypersons refer to as "grammar" or "mechanics") should be taught within the context of the students' writing, as in the program under scrutiny.

#### *Concerns about Content; or, "Teach the rules before you let the students play the game"*

Both educational and psychological research show that communicative competence is acquired in context, not in isolation (Rubin and Kantor 1984) and, if in school, in an integrated program (Allen and Kellner 1984). The rules of language are learned in context and cannot be adequately taught or learned before playing the communication game. The parents' content concern (whether to teach grammar or writing) is also soundly answered by the research: given the choice, teach writing and then deal with grammar either in mini- lessons or individually, as it comes up in the context of each student's writing. "The research findings show clearly and overwhelmingly that direct methods of instruction, focusing on writing activities and the structuring of ideas, are more efficient in teaching sentence structure, usage, punctuation, and other related factors than such methods as nomenclature drill, diagramming, and rote memorization of grammatical rules" (Strom 1960). This rejection of isolated grammar instruction has been well documented over the past several decades (Braddock, Lloyd-Jones, and Schoer 1963; Hartwell 1985). That rejection is founded on both theory and empirical research (O'Hare 1973; Petrosky 1977; Rose 1980; Shaughnessy 1977; Shuy 1981; Sperling 1989; Suhor 1984; and many others). The grammar issue is so old and rehashed that researchers have now turned to more interesting questions (Hartwell 1985) and broader issues (Durst 1992) such as how people make meaning (Spivey 1991), how people know (McCarthy and Fishman 1991), how classroom discussion increases knowledge development (Sweigart 1991), and gender-based differences in writing (Rubin and Greene 1992).

The atomistic, reductivist, behavioristic views of language prevalent before the 1957 publication of Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* have since been replaced in the profession by a number of holistic, constructivist views (Shuy 1981; Reyes 1991); a couple of generations of scientific advance have occurred in language studies in the past 30 years—advances the parents at the meeting were obviously unaware of.

What's happening at our junior high is nothing new: changes in the way linguists view grammar and language acquisition were considered revolutionary nearly forty years ago when noted linguist, W. Francis Nelson, concluded that, "traditional or scientific grammars are of highly questionable value in improving a person's ability to handle the structural patterns of his language" (Nelson 1954). Kaulfers, a teacher, reported ten years earlier that "whatever the value of formal grammar may be to adult specialists in comparative linguistics, morphology, etymology, philology, or lexicography, the fact remains that no scientific study of the many available . . . has shown that sentence analysis, diagramming, parsing, or nomenclature drill is of the slightest benefit in improving a person's own personal use of language. Instead, the chief result of such methods has often been a strong dislike of language work" (Kaulfers 1944).

### *Concerns about Social Change; or,*
### *"What happened to the good old days?"*

The research on writing deals only indirectly with the parents' underlying concern that the schools are changing as society and culture changes. One indisputable fact about change is clear, though, and every linguist knows it: language is changing, began changing as soon as the first word was uttered, and will continue to change. The changes are not good or bad; but they are inevitable. Those constant, unstoppable changes, however, outdate whatever grammar books a school system chooses to use. Considering the social and educational advances made in recent years, the "good old days" were not so good, after all.

### Righting Wrong-Headed Views of Language

Contrary to statements made by some of the parents at the meeting, English is a Germanic language only marginally related to Latin. Pedagogical grammars taught in schools are usually based on the uninformed view of language that English is derived from Latin; therefore, the pedagogical grammars are generally regarded by linguists as unscientific, misleading, and confusing to the students. Furthermore, as early as 1950, researchers concluded that knowing English grammar has little bearing on the learning of a foreign language (*Encyclopedia of Educational Research* 1950).

### Putting Grammar in Its Place

The issue is not whether to teach grammar; it is how to teach grammar. Errors in writing are signs of growth in thinking and language. Teaching writing and grammar in the best way involves allowing the developing writer to make mistakes and then dealing with the mistakes in the context of the student's writing. Junior high curriculum puts grammar in its place: in the writing process, not isolated from it. The problem is largely one of educating the public to the rationale and effectiveness of the current approach, not turning back the clock.

Unfortunately, the problem has been compounded by the historically inadequate preparation of new teachers (Roberts 1988). Rather than reverting to what some people call the basics—skills-based education—Samford University is combating the problem with a new curriculum for educators and other students, a strong writing across the curriculum program, and a teacher inservice training program in writing that is based on a nationally implemented staff development model. Combined, these innovations at the university level provide well-trained teachers and offer opportunities for professional development to the teachers in our surrounding cities. A similar progressive curriculum should be adopted in our schools, and all reactionary solutions should be recognized as backward steps and, therefore, rejected.

### A Positive Concluding Note

It is refreshing to see parents deeply concerned about their children's education. I applaud and encourage the continued discussions between the parents and the school system, but all parties need to remember that the current debate is not new: the National Council of Teachers of English recommended in 1936 that grammar not be taught apart from writing (Weaver 1979). Furthermore, all parties must accept the clear fact that the English pedagogy and curriculum under fire are modern, based on solid scientific research, effective, and reflective of the direction of English education nationwide; it is not haphazard, as language instruction has been in the past. It is also important to recognize that many school systems in other states adopted a writing-as-process, workshop approach long before it was introduced to our school, and that under your department chair's leadership, your junior high school has almost caught up with them. I urge you to press forward, refusing to retreat from the advances made in the past five years.

I shall be pleased to accept any opportunity to address these issues with you and with any others whom you deem appropriate.

Sincerely,
David H. Roberts
Professor of English

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## PARTNERSHIP PLANNING: AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL

by William J. Gallagher
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

Curriculum planning in most school-related partnership situations, whether these be partnerships pairing the school with parents, businesses, teacher preparation programs, or even departments within a school, generally follows the outline suggested by Ralph Tyler in his classic text, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949). According to Tyler's rationale, educators must determine the objectives to be pursued, the learning experiences likely to lead to accomplishment of those objectives, a coherent organizational scheme for ordering the experiences, and methods for evaluating the extent to which the objectives have been accomplished. Tyler focuses much of his attention on the three sources we should consider in determining objectives: the learners themselves, the nature of society, and subject area specialists. He then suggests that this potentially long list of objectives be screened for consistency with a psychology of learning and a philosophy of education. The more concise list of objectives that results must then be stated in terms of behaviors of the learner. While those involved in school partnerships usually don't have the time or resources to reconsider in detail Tyler's suggested sources, it is important to note that in most cases the curriculum planning group's starting point is an attempt to determine what is to be accomplished, moving quickly from broad purposes to more refined goals and then to highly specific objectives. It is on this idea of a starting point for curriculum development that I would like to focus.

Critics of Tyler have argued that what is essential is the educational philosophy of a planning group, and that Tyler's concern for analyzing the three sources is little more than window dressing (Herbert Kliebard. 1975. "Persistent Curriculum Issues in Historical Perspective." In *Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists,* edited by William F. Pinar. Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Co.). John McNeil reports that he has set up planning groups in curriculum classes that try both approaches: groups that start with a consideration of learners, society, and subject specialists in order to determine objectives; and groups that discuss educational philosophy as a precursor to determining objectives. McNeil found that the groups starting with the more concrete ideas related to Tyler's three sources were more productive; the other groups spent time arguing and discussing and getting less done (John McNeil. 1990. *Curriculum: A Comprehensive Introduction.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman & Co.). Critics might thus have a reasonable theoretical point, but in the time constraints of practice the theory breaks down. Partnerships that involve language arts teachers with representatives from parent, business, or community groups can be especially susceptible to prolonged discussions and the spinning of wheels when it comes to arriving at a philosophy of education. It is also the case that prolonged concentration on the development of goals and objectives can be a rather boring undertaking, especially for groups that don't normally deal with schooling. One alternative is to depart from the Tyler model rather significantly. Although for some (especially, it seems, administrators) it seems written in stone that teachers must have clearly stated objectives before beginning the instructional process, teachers in the language arts are finding that the learning experiences themselves are the most invigorating aspect of instruction, and that goals and objectives can actually flow from experience rather than dictate what the experience must be. Teachers know this, but how can this best be communicated to others in the partnership planning group?

A useful and productive approach to take is to use the experiences themselves as a starting point in curriculum planning and development. Discussions that build from what works in the classroom are naturally more lively and enjoyable. Parents and business leaders can reflect on their own schooling and get into a flow of remembering and recounting enjoyable experiences. This notion of enjoyment becomes a key, and the realization that desirable outcomes result quite naturally from the experiences themselves becomes the force that drives curriculum planning.

Putting learning experiences first also helps in getting business people in the partnership away from a production model of education that stresses student outcomes as if they were somehow profits. We don't want to ignore purposes, and we don't want to ignore outcomes. We can, however, put these aspects of the planning model in a state of suspended animation while partners focus on making the experiences themselves provocative, exciting, and enjoyable.

It is ironic that Tyler himself ends his classic little volume with a question and an answer that potentially turns his own model on its head. His question is whether the sequence of steps to be followed in curriculum revision must always be the same as the order of presentation in his model. His answer is a resounding "No." Sadly, many in education take it as a given that we must always begin planning with objectives. Partnerships can proceed quite productively by focusing on educational experiences themselves as a starting point.

## THE PAPERLESS CLASS

Randall E. Smith
Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

The isolation that classroom teachers often feel is well documented in the professional literature. Partnerships among teachers and between classroom teachers and university professors, which could help alleviate this sense of isolation, are often inhibited by the lack of a viable way to communicate across time and space. During the summer of 1992, at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, a colleague and I designed a paperless class, titled "Integrating Computers into the Classroom." The purposes of the class were to introduce graduate students to the latest networking technology available at the university and to develop methods for integrating electronic technology into their classrooms and schools. An underlying result of the course was the development of several informal partnerships and one university/school partnership involving computer technology.

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville is fortunate to have two connecting classrooms housing a Macintosh network of 20 Macintoshes, and a MS-DOS network of 25 IBMs. The Macintosh lab progresses from Apple IIs and Apple GSs to a Macintosh network that is state of the art. We received the IBM network, which includes electronic mail (e-mail), through a grant in 1988. We integrated this e-mail technology into our paperless class—but more about that later.

The graduate course "Integrating Computers into the Classroom" was a dream class for us, but we really didn't know if the classroom teachers in our area would see the need to add this course to their graduate programs. Pre-registration filled the class with a final total enrollment of twenty-four students. This proved to us that teachers, too, felt the craving, urgency, and necessity to integrate computers into their classrooms and to connect with one another electronically.

The first problem these teachers/graduate students had in our paperless classroom was to acclimate themselves to reading a syllabus from a computer monitor. Many had to have a hard copy (one on paper) in order to feel comfortable understanding the requirements in the syllabus. The syllabus, note taking, and software evaluations were done on the Macintosh computers. We developed a form using Hypercard for the note taking and software evaluation. The final paper was to be their plan for how to incorporate computers and a network into their classroom or school. Their plan was to be developed from teacher-presented information, class discussions, networking information, guest speakers, and software evaluations. This final project, written using a word processing program, was to be sent through the network to their classmates' folders, as were their class notes and software evaluations.

Every day before class, each student would log-on the MS-DOS network and receive their e-mail. Through e-mail the class was informed of upcoming due dates and had to answer our questions concerning textbook readings, class discussions, and teacherdirected information. The e-mail was also used by the students to write messages to their classmates individually and/or to the whole class. We broke the ice with e-mail the first day of class by having the students write a joke to share with the class via the network. The students were motivated by e-mail and used it to get help, share drafts of their plans, discuss interesting software to evaluate, and to plan a class luncheon. So many messages were being sent that students had to read their e-mail several times during the day just to keep up with the discussions.

Once the class became comfortable communicating, writing, and composing on the computer, they started asking more and better questions and writing longer responses to our questions through the e-mail. The students wanted more feedback from us. More response from us generated more questions and longer responses from the students—a true dialogue began. We finally had to cut the number of planned questions in half due to this escalating electronic conversation.

We also found that students were not only communicating more with us through e-mail, they were "talking" more and more to each other. Five students have kept their log-on codes and continue communicating with us and their classmates on a regular basis. Some check their e-mail once a week when they come to their graduate night classes, while one calls in using her modem. These informal partnerships, I feel, are a healthy way for teachers to combat their feelings of isolation and potentially postpone and/or prevent burnout.

An exciting, if more formal, partnership resulting from this class involves an English teacher from Martin Luther King Junior

High School in East St. Louis, Illinois, and me. Ms. Stevens wants to make the technological dream plan she developed in our class a reality for her students. But like all schools, money is a problem. Her plan incorporates the teaching of English skills with computer skills in order to motivate students who, for the most part, have a poor outlook on the future because of the conditions in their community. She hypothesizes that students need to see and believe that learning to write on the computer will give them a skill that will be useful outside the classroom. The plan calls for students to produce a portfolio of their computer-generated written work. This portfolio would contain a variety of assignments using various computer programs.

Ms. Stevens feels that because of the novelty of writing on a computer the students' attitude about learning English will be more positive. Ms. Stevens and I are teaming up to write a grant to secure funds to try to fulfill her dream of lap-top computers in her English classroom.

Through electronic communication and networking, first learned in our paperless classroom, teachers are working together to propel themselves and their students into the future world of technology.

## HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD BECOME A BETTER WRITER

### Things to Do at Home

1. Build a climate of words at home. Go places and see things with your child, then talk about what has been seen, heard, smelled, tasted, touched. The basis of good writing is good talk, and younger children especially grow into stronger control of language when loving adults—particularly parents—share experiences and rich talk about those experiences.
2. Let children see you write often. You're both a model and a teacher. If children never see adults write, they gain an impression that writing occurs only at school. What you *do* is as important as what you say. Have children see you writing notes to friends, letters to business firms, perhaps stories to share with the children. From time to time, read aloud what you have written and ask your children their opinion of what you've said. If it's not perfect, so much the better. Making changes in what you write confirms for the child that revision is a natural part of writing—which it is.
3. Be as helpful as you can in helping children write. Talk through their ideas with them; help them discover what they want to say. When they ask for help with spelling, punctuation, and usage, supply that help. Your most effective role is not as a critic but as a helper. Rejoice in effort, delight in ideas, and resist the temptation to be critical.
4. Provide a suitable place for children to write. A quiet corner is best, the child's own place, if possible. If not, any flat surface with elbow room, a comfortable chair, and a good light will do.
5. Give the child, and encourage others to give, the gifts associated with writing:
   - pens of several kinds
   - pencils of appropriate size and hardness
   - a desk lamp
   - pads of paper, stationery, envelopes—even stamps
   - a booklet for a diary or daily journal

   (Make sure that the booklet is the child's private property; when children want to share, they will.)

   - a dictionary appropriate to the child's age and needs. Most dictionary use is for checking spelling, but a good dictionary contains fascinating information on word origins, synonyms, pronunciation, and so forth.
   - a thesaurus for older children. This will help in the search for the "right" word.
   - a typewriter (even a battered portable will do), allowing for occasional public messages, like neighborhood newspapers, or play scripts.
   - erasers or "white-out" liquid for correcting errors that the child wants to repair without rewriting.
6. Encourage (but do not demand) frequent writing. Be patient with reluctance to write. "I have nothing to say" is a perfect excuse. Recognize that the desire to write is a sometime thing. There will be times when a child "burns" to write; others, when the need is cool. But frequency of writing is important to develop the habit of writing.
7. Praise the child's efforts at writing. Forget what happened to you in school and resist the tendency to focus on errors of spelling, punctuation, and other mechanical aspects of writing. Emphasize the child's successes. For every error the child makes, there are dozens of things he or she has done well.
8. Share letters from friends and relatives. Treat such letters as special events. Urge relatives and friends to write notes and letters to the child, no matter how brief. Writing is especially rewarding when the child gets a response. When thank-you notes are in order, after a holiday especially, sit with the child and write your own notes at the same time. Writing ten letters (for ten gifts) is a heavy burden for the child; space the work and be supportive.
9. Encourage the child to write for information, free samples, and travel brochures. For suggestions about where to write and how to write, purchase a copy of the helpful U.S. Postal Service booklet *All about letters* (available from NCTE @ $2.50 per copy; class sets of 20 or more, $1.50 each).
10. Be alert to occasions when the child can be involved in writing, for example, helping with grocery lists, adding notes at the end of parents' letters, sending holiday and birthday cards, taking down telephone messages, writing notes to friends, helping plan trips by writing for information, drafting notes to school for parental signature, writing notes to letter carriers and other service persons, and preparing invitations to family get-togethers.

Writing for real purposes is rewarding, and the daily activities of families present many opportunities for purposeful writing. Involving your child may take some coaxing, but it will be worth your patient effort.

### Things to Do for School Writing Programs

1. Ask to see the child's writing, either the writing brought home or the writing kept in folders at school. Encourage the use of writing folders, both at home and at school. Most writing should be kept, not thrown away. Folders are important means for helping both teachers and children see progress in writing skill.
2. Be affirmative about the child's efforts in school writing. Recognize that for every error a child makes, he or she does many things right. Applaud the good things you see. The willingness to write is fragile. Your optimistic attitude toward the child's efforts is vital to strengthening his or her writing habit.
3. Be primarily interested in the content, not the mechanics of expression. It's easy for many adults to spot misspellings,

faulty word usage, and shaky punctuation. Perfection in these areas escapes most adults, so don't demand it of children. Sometimes teachers—for the same reason—will mark only a few mechanical errors, leaving others for another time. What matters most in writing is words, sentences, and ideas. Perfection in mechanics develops slowly. Be patient.

4. Find out if children are given writing instruction and practice in writing on a regular basis. Daily writing is the ideal; once a week is not often enough. If classes are too large in your school, understand that it may not be possible for teachers to provide as much writing practice as they or you would like. Insist on smaller classes—no more than 25 in elementary schools and no more than four classes of 25 for secondary school English teachers.
5. Ask if *every* teacher is involved in helping youngsters write better. Worksheets, blank-filling exercises, multiple-choice tests, and similar materials are sometimes used to *avoid* having children write. If children and youth are not being asked to write sentences and paragraphs about science, history, geography, and the other school subjects, they are not being helped to become better writers. *All* teachers have responsibility to help children improve their writing skills.
6. See if youngsters are being asked to write in a variety of forms (letters, essays, stories, etc.) for a variety of purposes (to inform, persuade, describe, etc.), and for a variety of audiences (other students, teachers, friends, strangers, relatives, business firms). Each form, purpose, and audience demands differences of style, tone, approach, and choice of words. A wide variety of writing experiences is critical to developing effective writing.
7. Check to see if there is continuing contact with the imaginative writing of skilled authors. While it's true that we learn to write by writing, we also learn to write by reading. The works of talented authors should be studied not only for ideas but also for the writing skills involved. Good literature is an essential part of any effective writing program.
8. Watch out for "the grammar trap." Some people may try to persuade you that a full understanding of English grammar is needed before students can express themselves well. Some knowledge of grammar *is* useful, but too much time spent on study of grammar steals time from the study of writing. Time is much better spent in writing and conferring with the teacher or other students about each attempt to communicate in writing.
9. Encourage administrators to see that teachers of writing have plenty of supplies—writing paper, teaching materials, duplicating and copying machines, dictionaries, books about writing, and classroom libraries of good books.
10. Work through your PTA and your school board to make writing a high priority. Learn about writing and ways youngsters learn to write. Encourage publication of good student writing in school newspapers, literary journals, local newspapers, and magazines. See that the high school's best writers are entered into the NCTE Achievement Awards in Writing Program, the Scholastic Writing Awards, or other writing contests. Let everyone know that writing matters to you.

By becoming an active participant in your child's education as a writer, you will serve not only your child but other children and youth as well. You have an important role to play, and we encourage your involvement.

# Announcements

## QUARTERLY "BEST ARTICLE" AWARD

The Conference on English Leadership announced the recipient and runners-up of its 1992 "Best Article" award for articles published in the Quarterly during 1991. The award honors the author of the best article published in 1991, so chosen because of its value to the department chair, the quality of its writing, and the originality of what it said.

Barbara King-Shaver, a high school English teacher at South Brunswick High School in Monmouth Junction, New Jersey, won the award for her article, "Whole Language: Implications for Secondary Classrooms," published in the February 1991 Quarterly, an issue devoted to whole language. In the article, King-Shaver explores the implications that whole language has for secondary classrooms, offering detailed examples of how the philosophy might be applied to lesson designs for teaching the standards, such as poetic conventions and analysis of a novel. Barbara King-Shaver was recognized and presented with a plaque during the CEL Luncheon at the Annual Convention of NCTE in Louisville.

Honorable mention went to finalists for the award: Sharon Wieland, "Student Writers Set Their Own Goals," published in the February 1991 Whole Language issue, Kathleen Strickland, "Towards a New Philosophy of Language Learning," published in the February 1991 Whole Language issue, and Rick Chambers, "The Business of Television," published in the December 1991 Encores issue.

The judging committee included Susan Benjamin of Highland Park High School in Illinois, Diana Dreyer of Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, Daniel Heller of Brattleboro Union High School in Vermont, and Tom Jones of Wyoming Valley West High School in Plymouth, Pennsylvania.

## 1993 CEL Conference, Pittsburgh: STANDARDS FOR ALL

**Wednesday, November 17–**
**Thursday, November 18, 1993**

## CALL FOR PROGRAM PROPOSALS

Beginning with the publication in 1983 of the College Board's Academic Preparation for College, which was followed closely by A Nation at Risk, and continuing through President Bush's America 2000, the idea of raising standards in America's schools has been hotly debated. Political figures, educators in all disciplines, parents, and students all want clearly defined standards, but many issues cloud the discussion of the subject. We as leaders in a specific subject discipline need to examine the questions that surround raising standards for all, especially if we as a nation are serious about developing schools that promote excellence, equity, and inclusion in teaching and learning and that look to make teachers and students more accountable as we move to a more global twenty-first century world.

The CEL Program Planning Committee seeks leaders in English willing to address these issues and others at its conference in Pittsburgh, November 17–18, 1993. The program will involve keynote speakers, a concluding panel discussion, and special interest sessions. We encourage you to submit a proposal to lead a one-hour session on the issue of standards for schools, teachers, and students. Proposals may be for

- individual presentation in which a single person discusses one issue and seeks feedback and discussion from participants
- panel presentation in which several individuals address the subject allowing a period for questions
- debate in which two or more leaders present opposite sides of an issue promoting audience participation at the end
- round table discussion in which table leaders encourage discussion from all participants

Although proposals need not be limited to the theme, its use as a guideline is helpful to the committee. We are looking for imaginative, innovative, thought-provoking proposals with clear objectives and methods of presentation. Titles, descriptions, and appropriate grade levels must accurately reflect material to be presented. No topic changes can be made after acceptance. No individual may be involved in more than one presentation.

As a nonprofit organization, CEL cannot offer presenters an honorarium, registration, meal, lodging, or other expenses. We do hope, though, that you will share your expertise with conference participants. If you know of someone who would make a good presenter, please pass along a copy of the proposal form. A large number of proposals will help the Planning Committee develop a diverse program for Pittsburgh.

## CEL COMMISSIONS AND CHARGES

The following five commissions share a similar charge, distinguished only by the details of locale or level in the educational continuum. These five commissions are—

**English/Language Arts Leadership in:**

1. **URBAN SCHOOLS—Pearline Humbles, Washington, D.C.**
2. **RURAL SCHOOLS—Bill Mull, Roseburg, OR**
3. **ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS—Kathleen Strickland, Pittsburgh, PA**
4. **MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS—Kathy Bellin, Arvada, CO**
5. **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS—Wanda Porter, Honolulu, HI**

This commission's goal is to support leaders in their efforts to deliver quality curricula and instruction in English/Language Arts in urban, rural, elementary, middle/junior high, and independent schools. The commission will address this goal by identifying issues; providing forums and networks; disseminating information and research among practitioners; and educating policy and decision makers about issues and information.

### Commission on Research into Practice: Issues in English/Language Arts

Nina Bono, Chair
St. Louis, MO

This commission's charge is to study the processes of change as they affect leaders in English/Language Arts, attempting to bring research findings into classrooms and staff development activities on a practical level; to present successful models of such change efforts through conference presentations and workshops as well as through journal articles.

### Commission on Developing English/Language Arts Leadership

Bill Weber, Chair
Libertyville, IL

This commission's charge is to research and publicize programs and practices in the preparation and development of leaders in the area of English/Language Arts; to bring this information to the membership through public recognition of exemplary programs, through conference leadership training workshops, and journal articles.

Each of these commissions will be chaired by a person from the CEL general membership. This chair will be selected by the commission membership and will serve for a two-year, renewable term. A member of the CEL Executive Board will be an "ex-officio" member of each committee for communication purposes. The findings and work of the commissions will be shared at CEL workshop presentations and through the *CEL Leadership Quarterly.*

## SPECIAL GUEST-EDITED ISSUE: CASE STUDIES FOR ENGLISH LEADERS

by Henry G. Kiernan
Southern Regional High School District
Manahawkin, New Jersey

MBA candidates and prospective attorneys are trained to enter their professions by studying a variety of classic cases. In education, we are rediscovering that case studies, offering a reflective analysis of decision-making experiences, provide a means for professional growth that can be insightful and lasting. As guest editor for the December 1993 issue, I am issuing a call for case studies reflecting on critical events in your English Department. These events or episodes may be typical, exemplary, or problematic. In particular, I am looking for cases rich in contextual detail, anecdotes, and reconstructed dialogue about

- "success stories" in restructuring an English Department or school
- conditions necessary for developing teachers and supervisors as reflective practitioners
- situations that raise unresolved questions or issues
- leadership episodes that examine decision-making experiences for supervisors and teachers

For each case selected, a panel of experienced English leaders will provide brief commentaries. In order to provide time to elicit the panel's responses, please submit manuscripts by **May 15, 1993.** Address case studies and inquiries to: Henry G. Kiernan, Supervisor of Humanities, Southern Regional High School District, 600 N. Main Street, Manahawkin, New Jersey 08050, PHONE 609-597-9481, FAX 609-978-0298.

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS— PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly,* a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always welcomed.

Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In particular, upcoming issues will have these themes:

October 1993 (July 1 deadline):
**The Other Side of the Desk: Teachers in Other Roles; On the Job, After School, In the Community**

December 1993 (May 15 deadline):
**Case Studies of Chairs**
guest editor: Henry Kiernan
Southern Regional High School District of Ocean County
Manahawkin, New Jersey 08050 (609-597-9481)

February 1994 (November 1 deadline):
**Practical Advice, Strategies, and Suggestions**

May 1994 (February 1 deadline):
**Best and the Brightest: Innovation and Teaching**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25- or 3.5-inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced typed copy. Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor, *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326. (FAX 412-738-2098)

## GREAT BEGINNINGS

The Conference on English Leadership (CEL) of NCTE invites educators at all levels of instruction to submit short chapters for a volume on "Great Beginnings: Designs for Beginning Teachers." CEL encourages contributions from department chairs, supervisors or administrators of teachers K–12, instructors in teacher preparation programs, first- and second-year teachers, teachers working with student teachers, mentors in mentor/intern programs, experienced teachers, teachers who are thinking of leaving the profession.

Articles are invited that focus on such topics as

- What works and what is missing in making the first- or second-year teacher's life meaningful
- Successful supervision strategies for encouraging outstanding beginning teachers to remain in the profession
- Creating a supportive teaching community
- Personal experiences of a first-, second-, or third-year teacher
- Reentering the classroom
- An experienced teacher looking back

Manuscripts can range in length from 5–12 double-spaced pages. Two copies of each manuscript should be submitted. Name, address, school affiliation, and telephone numbers should be included on the title page. Editorial correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to Ira Hayes, CEL Monograph, Syosset High School, Syosset, New York 11791. (PHONE: 516-364-5675, FAX 516-921-6032)

**Manuscript deadline: January 1, 1994**

# Book Release

C. Mark Hurlbert and Samuel Totten, Eds. *Social Issues in the English Classroom*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992.

American society seethes with disturbing social issues, but to teachers' dismay, many of today's students know little about them and seem to care less. In a new book from the National Council of Teachers of English, 25 concerned teachers and professors tell what they do to help their students learn how to become thoughtful, informed, active citizens.

The contributors to *Social Issues in the English Classroom* explain why and how they integrate inquiry into troubling issues with the study of language and literature and make it the subject of discussion and writing-to-learn activities. The book, a project of the NCTE Committee on Contemporary Issues, is edited by C. Mark Hurlbert, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Samuel Totten, University of Arkansas at Fayetteville.

Introducing the volume, Totten traces student apathy to curricula that skim over masses of facts without helping students figure out why knowing them is valuable. Schools avoid tough issues, he says, because of fear of disapproval from the community, ignorance, the notion that average people (including students) should leave complex topics to "experts," and lack of academic freedom below the college level.

English classes, Totten says, are a logical place to explore controversial issues because issues arise from personal stories and are illuminated in literature, as characters face challenges that make them think and care. (Huck Finn, for instance, confronts his legal obligation to turn in his friend Jim, the escaped slave, and chooses civil disobedience.) Social issues, Totten adds, are vehicles for helping students understand their "connectedness" to the larger world, outgrow knee-jerk opinions, and comprehend life as a matter of choices. Such issues lend themselves to interdisciplinary teaching, which the editors favor.

The contributing teachers, diverse in their backgrounds and politics, approach problems such as racism, sexism, classism, terrorism, homophobia, and environmental pollution from varied perspectives. They generally favor cooperative inquiry over confrontation and emphasize a search for workable remedies.

For example, Edythe Johnson Holubec, David W. Johnson, and Roger T. Johnson offer an alternative to debate, in which students first research and argue one side of a question, then switch to argue for the opposition, and finally join in seeking a third, consensus position. Alan Shapiro describes a series of discussion exercises designed to help students enter into others' ways of thinking, and to probe the often destructive role of the desire for certainty in human relations.

Other contributors use interviewing, ethnographic research techniques, computer conferencing, and writing to help students explore social issues from the inside. Their essays are grouped in sections on teaching for social responsibility through use of dialogue, in writing instruction, and in literature study.

A final section explores the theme of "Politics, Change, and Social Responsibility." Coeditor Hurlbert and Michael Blitz look at the influence of business in shaping federal education policy. Sandra Stotsky argues that American society has positive aspects which critics shouldn't ignore. Henry A. Giroux points out that teaching a discourse of morality in classrooms requires that the voices of students' varied communities be valued. Totten observes that the teacher-contributors are breaking ground in an area of education where research on outcomes is scant and classroom-based studies could be fruitful.

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## CALL FOR PROGRAM PROPOSALS

## STANDARDS FOR ALL

**1993 CEL Conference, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**
**Wednesday, November 17–Thursday, November 18, 1993**

(PLEASE TYPE OR PRINT CLEARLY)

Presentation Title ________________________________________

Will you need an overhead projector? ☐ Yes ☐ No

CEL cannot guarantee the availability of other types of audiovisual equipment.

Audience: ☐ Elementary ☐ Middle School ☐ High School ☐ College ☐ General

1. Contact Person (Please place an asterisk [*] in front of the preferred mailing address.)

   Name ________________________________________

   Home address ________________________________________

   phone ( ) ____________________

   School/Work Place name ________________________________________

   address ________________________________________

   phone ( ) ____________________

2. Names of other presenters: Attach an additional sheet with complete mailing information if there are others presenting with you.

3. Preferred Date

   We will attempt to honor your request; no guarantees are made, however.

   ☐ Wednesday, November 17, 1993
   ☐ Thursday, November 18, 1993

4. Type of session: ☐ individual ☐ panel ☐ debate ☐ round table

SESSION DESCRIPTION: Attach a concise description of your session, including objectives and possible outcomes. Also include a one-line synopsis that may be used in the program to describe the presentation.

Send the completed Program Proposal to:
Thomas W. Jones
1993 CEL Program Chair
Wyoming Valley West High School
150 Wadhams Street
Plymouth, PA 18651-2199

No proposals will be accepted by phone, but if you have questions, you may contact Tom at school (717) 779-5361 or home (717) 287-1266.

PROPOSALS MUST BE POSTMARKED NO LATER THAN FEBRUARY 28, 1993.

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

1. Proposals need not be limited to the theme, although its use as a guideline is helpful to the planning committee.
2. Proposals should be imaginative and innovative, with clear objectives and methods of presentation. Titles, descriptions, and appropriate grade levels must accurately reflect the material to be presented. No changes in topics should be made after acceptance.
3. Proposals may be for (a) roundtable discussion, in which the leader encourages discussion from all participants; (b) debate, in which two or more leaders present opposite sides of an issue, possibly encouraging audience participation; or (c) small-group presentations, in which the leader presents information, allowing a period for questions at the end.
4. As a nonprofit organization, CEL cannot offer to presenters an honorarium or registration, meal, lodging or other expenses.
5. Please make copies of this form to share with others who would like to make presentations.
6. Individuals may be involved in more than one presentation.

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Leadership for Excellence

# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

Conference on English Leadership

Volume 15, Number 2
May 1993
Editor: James Strickland

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## In This Issue

### POLITICS AND CHANGE

by James Strickland, editor

I was brought up to believe that you never discussed politics or religion, especially with friends, especially if you wished to keep them as friends. Having said that, I'm risking my friends and readers by offering an issue filled with political discussions, of one sort or another.

Politics is ultimately a matter of power—who has power and who is being controlled. Jeff Golub—classroom teacher, teacher educator, active member of numerous NCTE committees and commissions, computer guru, author, and raconteur—opens the discussion by examining the myriad voices to which teachers must listen and the varieties of pressures which teachers are under. Jeff is fortunate though; if the political pressures get to him, he has other options. There is some talk of his opening a T-shirt company. Look for his latest design at your local English teacher convention. It reads: "My life is a rough draft, but I'm revising as much as I can before I have to hand it in."

Don McAndrew and Mark Hurlbert handle an emotional political issue, the matter of standard edited English. Don and Mark expose the tyranny of standards and advocate making intentional errors as a strategy for sensitizing the profession and the community at large to the injustices committed in the name of correctness. English teachers are the worst, writing sentences they would not allow their students to, justifying it in the name of Shakespeare and poetic license. Read their piece to the end before writing letters to the editor, and then order Mark's new books: *Composition and Resistance* (Boynton/Cook) and *Social Issues in the English Classroom* (NCTE).

In college some twenty or more years ago, my friend Tommy and I wrote a country/rock song about psychic phenomena, playing Edgar Cayce tongue-in-cheek off of Marshall McLuhan. We called it, "The Medium is the Message, and I've a Message for You." It seems the medium is still the message, and Pamela Takayoshi, of Purdue University, examines the political aspects of using electronic mail messaging, focusing on the stories women tell about their experiences with the medium of e-mail.

Carol Jago, classroom teacher at Santa Monica High School and frequent contributor to the *Quarterly*, is "really cool." That's not just my opinion; it's what I was told by three student teachers from Indiana University of Pennsylvania—Melissa, Heather, and Jenn—who had the chance to talk to Carol while they were waiting for their mentor who brought them to the Annual Convention in Louisville. The three student teachers were as excited by meeting real teachers like Carol, teachers committed to life-long learning and exuberant about their profession, as they were by seeing the theorists and researchers they had read in their classes. Carol continues to create a student-centered curriculum; she relinquishes control and allows the students to choose. How simple, how political.

Speaking of student teachers, most of us imagined we would be teaching in classrooms very much like the ones we spent our own school years in. Terrie St. Michel tells what happened when the perils of finding a teaching position transported her into a very different culture. She used "rap" to reach her students—rapport.

(continued on page 2)

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NCTE
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096

Terrie developed a curriculum using an awareness of self as an entry to understanding literature, the classroom, and culture.

The issue comes to a close with a book review by Bill Williams and a software review/editorial by Wendy Paterson. Do I have any friends left?

## THE VOICES WE HEAR, THE PRESSURES WE FEEL

by Jeff Golub
University of South Florida, Tampa

Increasingly, educators are calling for change through conference presentations, regional writing projects, and professional publications, change in which students participate in their own learning and the teacher serves as a designer and director of classroom activities. Recommendations for an interactive approach include allowing students more time in class to write, with the teacher writing along with students, modeling the very behavior that he or she is trying to develop in the students, establishing in this way a community of writers and learners. And recommended instructional practices in the teaching of writing propose using students' classroom talk as a strategy for revision and a vehicle for learning. For instance, revising in small groups allows students to try out their ideas on each other, to find out what works in their writing and what does not, and to come to care about their classmates' communication efforts.

### All We Know and Can Do

The call for change at conference presentations and in professional journals has also urged teachers to incorporate work on editing skills into the writing process itself, focusing on particular editing problems as they arise in students' writing. For too many years, teachers have kept separate their lessons on grammar and usage from their writing activities, often working on editing skills before they allow their students to engage in extended writing activities. This practice is analogous to the idea of pumping the brakes while the car is still in the garage!

The interactive approach being urged also emphasizes the importance of engaging students in authentic communication, speaking and writing experiences which have the students communicating to real audiences for real purposes. Directing students to write without an audience in mind is like asking them to talk into a "dead" phone with no one at the other end to listen and respond. No one talks into a "dead" phone. It's an artificial, unproductive exercise, leaving the speaker or writer unmotivated and uninterested. Authentic communication, on the other hand, invites engagement as students speak and write to persuade, inform, describe, and create. They are aware of their audience and adjust their language performance in response to the feedback they are sure to receive. This is a welcome change from traditional methods of writing instruction.

Even the methods for assessing students' writing abilities are changing from a one-shot evaluative test at the end of a semester to an on-going monitoring of students' progress through the use of portfolios. An end-of-term test is like a snapshot in that it purports to give us a momentary glimpse of a student's performance with language, but it provides very little information of value or relevance. Often it is given in the form of a multiple-choice exam, so we learn nothing about how a student actually writes; it tends to focus on the mastery of editing skills rather than on the more substantive and important decisions that a writer makes when engaged in composing discourse; and it limits its coverage to a very narrow range of writing skills, if it includes those skills at all. A portfolio of a student's writing efforts over the course of a semester or year, however, is like a movie in its ability to reveal a student's emerging competence with language over time. We see how a student performs in writing with a variety of forms of discourse; how extensively and competently a student revises; and, what particular problems tend to arise, whether they are problems of fluency or voice or sentence variety. This is indeed a promising practice and a worthwhile instructional tool for the teaching of writing.

All this we know and can do in the classroom. So, why aren't we doing it? It's not that the teachers don't want to change. They do. And it's not that they don't think it's necessary or desirable to change, either. Instead, it's the **voices** they hear and the pressures they feel—voices from such groups as the administrators, the parents, even the students—each group wanting to move in a different direction or, even worse, to keep things the same and not move at all! And the pressures that these groups exert—to cover the curriculum, to emphasize this and throw out that—to be accountable, but accountable for what? Each group has its own agenda which is imposed on the teachers in ways that cannot be ignored. We need to look closely at each of these groups, at what they want and what they say to the teachers, and at how they make themselves heard. And we need to identify some of the pressures that impinge on teachers' decisions about what to teach and how to teach it. In this way, we'll come to understand why changes are slow to occur within the classroom itself.

### The Voices

The pressure to "cover the curriculum" is perhaps the most direct and immediate pressure that teachers feel. This pressure is exerted by English Department chairs and their supervisors, including principals, curriculum specialists, and directors of instruction, all the way up to the school board. Too often, the curriculum becomes divorced from the teachers who teach it, so that needed changes cannot be made by those who are most affected by it. In some areas of the country, for instance, the curriculum is set up county-wide; how does one go about making changes in that? Moreover, the very idea of "covering" items in a curriculum is an approach that is sometimes difficult to work with or change. In an interactive approach to instruction, one does not "cover" anything. Instead, one works to "UN-cover" the curriculum, to provide experiences that allow students to develop certain insights and an improved level of language competence. Literature, in an interactive classroom, becomes a vehicle for the constructing and negotiating of meanings and for making sense of English in ways that make sense to students; it is not presented as something to be taught or covered. What happens when one must "cover" items—and usually there are far too many items in the curriculum anyway to be

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*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

covered adequately—is that one tends to focus on teaching content instead of teaching students.

A potent force driving this approach to covering the curriculum is the school or district end-of-semester tests. Since these exams test students on their mastery of the curriculum content, teachers feel a great pressure to make sure that students are adequately prepared—that they have indeed "covered" the material to be tested. It is difficult to depart from the established curriculum with this kind of pressure to conform. And the administrators and school board add to this pressure by sometimes publishing students' scores, either in a district newsletter, or even worse, in the local community newspaper.

### The Administrative Voice

It's discouraging to find that administrators' voices are so often heard exhorting teachers to raise the students' scores on the exams instead of questioning the validity or necessity of the exams themselves. Without administrative support, however, there is little chance for change. Despite the rhetoric of empowerment, classroom teachers simply do not have the power to make those crucial decisions that need to be made about what to teach, how and when to teach it, and how to demonstrate that significant improvement has occurred in their students' language performance.

Administrators constrain teachers in another way, too, through their annual evaluations of teachers' performance in the classroom. Often a principal is biased in his or her expectations, and these hidden assumptions about effective teaching behaviors, if not made explicit so they can be discussed and argued, can simply serve to intimidate and control the faculty members. There is a lot of truth to the anecdote about the principal who walks into the teacher's classroom to conduct an observation and, upon seeing the students working in small groups, says to the teacher, "Oh, sorry. I'll come back when you're teaching something."

The evaluation instruments that administrators use during these observations are another source of pressure and constraint. Florida's districts, for example, use the Florida Performance Measurement System (FPMS), a regressive checklist of behaviors that are marked as either "effective" or "ineffective." It's a pretty narrow range of behaviors that are included, too. Among those aspects of teaching and learning that are left out are such areas as "the teacher's content knowledge and treatment of subject matter; the relationship between teacher practices and student responses or outcomes; practices related to emerging bodies of research, such as the use of collaborative learning strategies or inductive methods for stimulating higher order thought process, and the teacher's performance outside of the observation context" (Darling-Hammond 1992, 20).

In her description of the problems involved with the FPMS, Darling-Hammond remarks that "expert veteran teachers must ignore their knowledge to pass such assessments. In fact, the most dramatic evidence of the results of these distortions is the fact that Michael Reynolds, Florida's 1986 Teacher of the Year . . . did not pass the FPMS assessment when he was being evaluated for a merit pay award. His principal and vice-principal could not find enough of the required behaviors during the laboratory lesson they observed to qualify him for merit pay. Furthermore, they had to mark him down for answering a question with a question, a practice forbidden by the FPMS, though popular with Socrates and many other effective teachers" (21–22). How would a teacher using an interactive approach to instruction fare if he or she were observed under this system?

### The Parental Voice

The parents of our students speak with another voice that pressures us to teach a certain way and provide tangible evidence of students' progress in our classes. It is appropriate that we be accountable for our work with our students, of course, but parents too often hold an outdated perspective of what English deals with, and they expect us to operate according to this old standard. For too many parents (and other community members), English is still seen as a subject whose focus is issues of grammar and usage. We need to begin a public relations program to inform the community of what we as English teachers are about, so that the public's standards of accountability will become more relevant and valid. Until we do so, we will continue to face parents who wonder why is Johnny's spelling so bad and what are we doing to fix it.

### The Voice of Our Students

Another [illegible] of voices—in this case, coming from our students—also speaks to us and pressures us to conduct our writing instruction in a certain way. Students tend to resist changes in their instruction: they are used to "one-shot" writing assignments, so they resist having to revise and rewrite; they are used to writing for the teacher-as-examiner, so their compositions lack voice, conviction, and ownership. Listen to our students' questions when we ask them to write: "How long does this have to be?" "When is it due?" "Are we supposed to. . . . ?" And when the rough draft is completed: "Is this what you want?" Does this sound as if students are willing to take risks, play with language, and generally engage in an authentic communication effort? Strange to think that we sometimes have to fight with our own students when we try to create a real context and community for writing, but this conflict does occur, and it does influence our composition instruction.

Yet, in one area of writing, we have taught our students all too well: to our chagrin, they have learned a lesson from us that the most important part of writing is grammar and usage—the editing skills. For instance, when a student brings me a rough draft to read, I want to get a sense of what the student was trying to convey in the writing and see how successful the student thinks the effort has been, so I routinely ask, "How well do you like what you've written here?" Many times students will reply, "I don't think it's very good. My spelling's really messed up." Students have come to equate their spelling ability with their writing ability in general. Where did they get this notion? And why do students complain about a grade they received on an essay by saying, "Why did you grade it so low? I only made three mistakes in my sentences." It's the circled words and the underlined sentence fragments they look for when trying to figure out what's "wrong" with their paper—and we taught them to do this by emphasizing the mastery of editing skills before teaching them to write fluently and honestly and creatively. Now we find that we must "un-teach" them in order to make them amenable to changes in our instructional approach and focus.

### The Voice of Our Colleagues

Even our colleagues in our own department sometimes raise their voices in protest, further constraining our efforts to reform our classroom instructional methods. Colleagues sometimes exert pressure to conform, to keep the department members doing things the way they have always done them, to raise those test scores and cover the curriculum. A typical example of this pressure may be seen in the complaints made by the teachers of 10th grade students that the 9th grade teachers did not prepare the students adequately in a certain area or skill—as if that was the main purpose of the 9th grade English class. College instructors complain about the poor instruction that must have been given in the senior high school; senior high teachers voice the same complaints about the junior high teachers. Is this what we are about, simply preparing students for the next grade? Yet, some of our colleagues would have us believe this, a pressure that keeps us focused on the mastery of discrete language skills instead of changing to a more holistic and authentic approach to instruction.

### Constraining Conditions

These, then, are some of the voices we hear and pressures we feel that impinge on our classroom instruction and, in some cases, keep us from implementing those changes in our approach that we believe are necessary and desirable. But, beyond these constraints, there is the nature of our daily teaching conditions that also affects and hampers our work in the classroom. Three elements of our teaching conditions are particularly disturbing, the first of which is the lack of time available to teachers for planning and decision-making. Parents and other community members do not realize how much time is spent on nonteaching duties.

Besides teaching close to 150 students daily, teachers have bus duty, lunchroom duty, hall duty, field trip preparation and supervision, evening supervision at school-sponsored events, test supervision, faculty meetings, department meetings, and meetings with the counselor and parents and administrators; teachers collect money for various community and school-sponsored drives; teachers distribute and collect attendance forms, overdue library book forms, progress report forms, and textbooks; teachers write student referrals to the principal, hall passes, recommendations, weekly academic reports for students, and scholarship warnings; teachers sign up for field trips, sign out projectors, the computer lab, and inservice classes; teachers call parents about missing assignments and missing students; and, teachers coach the drama club and the debate club and sports and yearbook and newspaper. The list is much longer, of course, but you get the idea. I heard a telling comment recently from a teacher who, while putting yet another completed form in the principal's mailbox, turned to a colleague and asked, "Why is it that we always seem to do things at the last moment?" The colleague replied, without hesitation, "Because that's the only moment we have."

And yet we are expected to do marvelous things with our students in the classroom: we are expected to plan and prepare and design and innovate and assess and evaluate. When are we supposed to do all this planning and designing and evaluating of lessons and units and activities? Teachers, quite simply, do not have that kind of time available to them within the contracted day. This, then, is what we take home with us to work on in the evenings, a constant practice that impinges on our time with our spouses and our families.

The second element of our daily teaching conditions that hampers our instructional efforts is a sense of isolation pervading our work in the classroom. Ironically, this isolation is felt at the same time that collaborative planning and teaching is coming to be seen as a valuable and worthwhile approach to instruction. And anything that is interdisciplinary in nature is also touted as necessary and desirable. The idea of mentoring, too, whether for new teachers or marginal teachers, is another concept that administrators want to implement and practice. But when are teachers supposed to (or even allowed to) get together to meet and plan and talk and implement all these collaborative innovations?

It is no surprise that two of the most popular sessions at national English conferences are coffee and conversation discussions and idea exchanges. At coffee and conversation meetings, teachers are invited to sit down to talk with their colleagues about various instructional and professional issues of particular interest or concern. The format of idea exchanges involves participants sharing specific teaching strategies. Teachers are serious in their desire to meet with their colleagues to find out what is happening in other schools around the country. "How do you handle the problem of. . . .?" "I'm thinking of starting. . . . What should I do first?" "I need a better way to get my students involved in. . . ." These are the kinds of concerns teachers have about their classes and their instructional approach, and they know well that worthwhile answers and insights may be found in conversations with fellow teachers.

But it is not easy for classroom teachers to obtain the release-time necessary to attend conventions. And the amount of money needed—for airfare and registration and hotel—is prohibitive. Districts, then, must provide opportunities for their teachers to get together at the local level. Inservice workshops within individual school districts are helpful, but they are scheduled only a couple of times each year and are sometimes devoted to a single topic instead of a variety of issues that concern teachers. So, for most of the school year, teachers are left on their own to seek out their colleagues for feedback and collaborative efforts. We have already seen how much (or how little) time teachers have for such collaboration. It is not a good situation.

The third element in our teaching conditions that constrains our work in the classroom is a sense of powerlessness that teachers feel. They feel powerless, for instance, to make changes in the curriculum they must "cover" because such decisions are usually made by an administrator or committee far removed from the daily classroom scene. Under such an arrangement, teachers must often cope with unrealistic demands about what is to be taught and how one much teach it. But who is in a better position to make such curricular decisions than the teachers themselves, the ones who actually work with the curriculum and who are able to make changes and improvements quickly and effectively when needed?

Another source of this feeling of powerlessness is in the exercise of power and control by school administrators. In many schools, for example, it is the principal who selects the various department chairs. Why can't the members of the department choose their own leader since they are the ones who have to work most closely with this person? In a recent conversation with a high school vice-principal, I suggested that teachers had the right and the responsibility to elect their own chairperson. "Oh, no," replied the vice-principal, "they can't do that because they might not pick the best person." Teachers, according to this administrator, are not capable of determining who the "best person" is for the job; only administrators can make this kind of decision. Here is an effective way to keep teachers in a powerless position.

As long as teachers continue to feel this sense of powerlessness—seeing curricular and political changes as being imposed from above by someone else—they will be unable to effect significant changes in either their classroom instruction or in their local school district. The feeling is that the teachers are there simply to carry out decisions and move in directions that others have ordered, and this is a feeling shared by both teachers and administrators.

These, then, are the voices we hear and the pressures we feel as we go about our business of trying to improve students' performance with language in the classroom. It used to be that we could simply close our door when the bell rang to start class and then be in charge of our own curriculum and instruction. Now we find that the voices have grown too strident and the pressures too great. The changes that must be made, then, are no longer simply changes in our instructional approach; they must now be accompanied by changes in the assumptions and attitudes of those voices that exert those pressures and maintain those teaching conditions.

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## TEACHING INTENTIONAL ERRORS IN STANDARD ENGLISH: A WAY TO "big smart english"

by Donald A. McAndrew and C. Mark Hurlbert
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Writers should be encouraged to make intentional errors in standard form and usage. Attacking the demand for standard English is the only way to end its oppression of linguistic minorities and learning writers. We believe this frontal assault is necessary for two reasons: (1) it affords experienced writers, who can choose or not choose to write standard English, a chance to publicly demonstrate against its tryanny and (2) if enough writers do it regularly, our cultures view of what is standard and acceptable may widen just enough to include a more diverse surface representation of language, creating a more equitable distribution not only of the power in language and literacy but also, ultimately, of the power in economics and politics that language and literacy allow.

We also believe that teachers at all levels should encourage their student writers to make intentional standard English errors. Students should be given a chance to demostrate against the tyranny of standard English as soon as possible. This experience will allow for classroom opportunities to discuss the repressive qualities of standard English in our culture. It will also allow a student to examine the nature of correctness in their writing, as their teacher discusses the students decisions and rationales for errors. Students will better understand language repression and discrimination, and they will have a new understanding of correctness as a socially determined fringe benefit of those in power. But, maybe most importantly, students will, in the process, personally participate in the kinds of political demonstrations that make it more likely that future language-in-use will be just. These future users will be aware of the connection between language and political power.

In what follows, we will do three things. First, we will talk about the nature of error—what it is as a specific phenomenon. Second, we will talk about accepted uses of non-standard English, showing that the standard of standard English is much wider than schools ever teach. Finally, we will close by suggesting ways that teachers can give students a more accurate understanding of the nature of standard English and a more just view of correctness as it exists in our society.

### The nature of error

We have been schooled, colleged, and trained to know error as our culture knows it. Our work as writers has, therefore, been what our culture demands—avoid error, clean up your drafts, edit, and proofread it, so that our final draft is as standard as standard can be. We must have suceeded because we hold a graduate degree and we are teachers. One can only get these if you follow the standard rules. But in this piece, we call for breaking the rules that were drummed into us year after year, draft after draft, editor after editor. It ain't easy to break these rules. They're not just the rules of standard language, they're some of the basic things we've learned since birth, the proprieties of our white middle class existences, and also the rules of authority that those rules of standard language communicate. Born into the working class, we've learned that proper behavior assured at least some white males of economic ascendency. So when we try to make intentional errors in our writing of this paper, we almost cannot do it. We really dont know how to do it. In fact, in this paper we had to go back and artificially write errors in.

But it feels very unnatural to make errors, wierd even, unless, of course, it is an honestly real error. And we make a lot of them when we write our drafts. These errors feel 100% natural, so much so that we don't even notice them. Real errors seem to be a part of the process of writing; we make them without consciously knowing it because when we write we focus on saying what we have to say, on our meaning, and run with that, deeply into ideas and content, our attention locked on creating comprehension and composing a form that will allow a reader to do the same. So, during this real writing time, only real errors exist, ones we are not aware of at all.

But wait. Does that fact imply that the errors we teachers find are something that only exist when we attend to them and become aware of them? Are errors something that we find when we read in a certain way? Read for real, like a writer or reader making meaning, and you have no conscious knowledge of errors; read some other way (we guess that would be unreal), like someone not concerned with making meaning but with correctness, and you find errors. Really read/write, find none. Unreally read/write, find some.

Before you say that the above just can't be true—errors aren't a natural part of writing and they certainly can't be the result of our attending to them—Joseph Williams, a linguist who has studied this phenonenon, finds this, indeed, to be the case. He gives us some food for thought when he states, "if we read any text the way we read freshman [sic] essays, we will find many of the same kind of errors we routinely expect to find and therefore do find" (p. 159). It would seem that errors are there all the time; it's how we read—real for meaning/unreal for errors—that makes them conscious. Many of us have tried reading a newspaper like a teacher, and, voila, errors! Their frequency is surprising especially after professional writers and editors and proofreaders and these days even computer programs have worked the text over. Williams continues by explaining that when we read for meaning, content constitutes the field of attention but when we read for errors in standard English, its those errors that receive our attention. Williams believes that if we read pieces for real, focusing on their meaning and content, we will find many fewer errors. So error becomes a decision of the reader at least as much as it is a function of the writer or a feature of the text.

But why do readers make the decision to read unreally, to read for correctness and errors instead of for meaning and content? We believe the decision is part of the political pressure exerted through standard form and usage. Reading for errors will discover them, and we can downgrade the piece and deny the writer. The standard is used to shave a few points from the potential of a specific writer to gain entrance into the power fraternity of standard language. When that writer is a speaker of another dialect or English as a second language or grows up in a family that doesn't particularly value writing or reading, then that writer's a much more likely candidate to have points shaved, making her a good candidate to lose. We traditionally have thought of error as in the piece of writing or in the writer, but now we must see it as in the reader and that reader reads as the political pressures demand.

## Allowed uses of non-standard English

For English teachers, those expert in language as art, we know many writers who broke many of the rules of the standard of their day—Twain's use of the colloquial, Gertrude Stein's experiments in syntax, e.e. cummings lack of standard punctuation, Joyce's narratology, etc., etc. Maybe we'd even conclude that the essence of art is to break the standards of the time. Many critics and theorists of literature, painting and film would applaud this conclusion—to break the standard is to make the art. Are we as a culture, therefore, reducing the chance of vital art, of a living literature, by demanding of students that they always follow the standard when they write? By emphasizing correctness to the standard over and over, across the disciplines and through the grades, are we shaving a point or two from the game called literature, reducing the number of people who try it even as a personal experience and reducing the vigor of those who might have the courage to break the standard? A culture which uses language as a way to repress its members certainly doesn't want everyone trying poetry, breaking the rules of poetics and language; this might lead to a culture which will question authority, think and feel, and maybe even challenge the limits of the socio-economic class to which they are assigned.

In recent studies of the language of repressed groups in our society, we find titles that in themselves break the rules of standard English. bell hooks [her choice regarding capitalization] titled her study of African-American women *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*, suggesting both the imtimate connection of non-standard usage with woman and people of color and dramatizing her own resistance to the standard by articulating a counter-standard. Studying the specific language of African-Americans, Geneva Smitherman titled her book, *Talkin' and Testifyin': The Language of Black America*. By doing so she associates the non-standard as the language of the powerless, portraying the ways in which the "non-standard" is itself governed by rules and choices. These scholars were permitted to use non-standard English in the public title of their books because they are privileged as experts—they already possess the power of language and its standard forms.

But not learning writers—kids in elementary and secondary schools—they are not given this permission. They lose points or grades to the degree they are labelled non-standard. It is only those who already command standard who are allowed non-standard usage. If this is so, and it seems to be the case in literature and academic scholarship, then it is the responsibility of those who are already permissioned to use non-standard English to reduce the demand for correctness required of those without permission, namely, learning writers and marginalized peoples. If those experts with permissiom continue to use non-standard language obtrusively, regularly and with flair, they might widen what readers and writers see as the standard by immersing all readers and writers in a sea of intentional non-standard usages and forms.

We can hear skeptics saying that what we are calling for is a Tower of Babel. We disagree. We believe that we would not get a Tower of Babel because non-standard is not a different language; it's just another perfectly valid and vital and capable form of English that our culture has decided not to value, and by doing so, those in power stay in power, the rich stay rich, white and male. Besides, we beleive that such skeptics underestimate the human desire and need to communicate. No one who wanted to be taken seriously would write to not be understood. We are saying that language, like people, is fluid, changing, expressive, improvisational. These qualities are not road signs to the Tower of Babel.

When non-standard is accepted, you get a new standard, one wider, responsive and available to more people. James Sledd spells out this new standard when he argues for a standard of "maximum diversity compatible with intelligibility" (174). In other words, if you can understand it, then it's standard. "I ain't got no books" works fine. One in our region that we see used in the papers of some students—"Yunz hair needs cut"—is fine. Sojourner Truth's "I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman?" fine, correct, powerful, memorable. When pre-school and elementary writers use invented spelling as they concentrate on meaning and content, we should respond to meaning and content. Or when one of the seventh graders in the class Don taught while on sabbatical wrote, "I'm looseing interest in this book [*Summer's Chance* by Patricia Harrison Easton]," we should have a reading conference with the student not give her a spelling exercise.

Changes widening the standard like these just presented, little ones if you will—usage, spelling, punctuation—may seem almost trivial in relation to our running theme of political repression from standard English, but those of us in schools know that in nearly every classroom teachers really come down hard on these over and over and over again. So do those in business and in other professions. The powers that be, teachers and employers, want their power to be, no changes, status quo, so they harp on what is most available, what seems to demand their corrective attention, what upsets their senses of propriety, uniformity, effort and achievement—students' writing. Of course, they mean mostly students' ability and (what sometimes seems to them to be a lack of) desire to use standard English. Yet some writers in the world of big-buck business and professions have taken issue with more than just these little aspects of standard English. Rather than play around with little rules of usage, spelling and punctuation, they go for the big ones—sentences, form, and voice.

Winston Weathers, in his *An Alternate Style*, describes some of those who have tried to liberate these big issues in standard English and who have worked to deprogram readers and writers from their zealous belief in it. Weathers examines what he calls a "grammar of style"—the conventions by which writers select their organization, development, structure, voice and style—the big issues in a piece of writing. He argues that currently Grammar A dominates, a grammar derived from the traditional view of the range of choices a writer has—simple to complex, colloquial to formal, common to elegant—and writers write within those accepted parameters. These traditional parameters are preserved in schools, especially English departments, and in the culture that sponsors these schools. Many of us who were trained there pass on these parameters to our students.

Weathers calls for the addition of Grammar B to standard English. Grammar B is a grammar of writers' choices which is not traditional and challanges the traditional. Weathers sees Grammar B emergent in many kinds of writing, especially new journalism and postmodern fiction. This new grammar allows for new forms e.g. the crot, a snapshot consisting of one or more sentences without any marked transitions to what came before or after, an obvious break from the traditional demand for tight structure and smooth, clear transitions. Weathers see other features: new sentence patterns like the labyrinthine sentence with its endless quality, full of convolutions, digressions and insertions and the old hobby horse of English teachers, the fragment, even the single word semtence; new structural patterns like the list or series presented almost free of sentence structure; double voice when a writer wants to present information and comment on it simultaneously; repetitions and repetitions and repetitions; and collage/montage which patches diverse elements together.

Certainly Weathers presents and documents the existence of another world of "grammar" which simply does not appear in the traditional writing or perscriptions of classrooms. Teachers, editors and the "scribes" of our society, as Alan Purves calls them, don't allow writing like Weathers describes; write this way and you can bet you'll be downgraded, maybe even placed in remedial writing. You're a non-writer, in Purves' sense of scribes who control writing, and you can be expected to be treated like a non-writer in school and on the job. Of course, if you were one of the new journalists or postmodern fiction writers who use these Grammar B strategies, as Weathers shows, then you'd be safe, safe in breaking the rules because you would have permission to do so as an expert writer like bell hooks, Geneva Smitherman, Twain, Stein, cummings and Joyce above. But, again, all these expert writers have used Grammar B to open up what is the standard style of standard English. The permission to break the rules of standard English, we argue, must be extended to learning writers especially those in schools.

### Encouraging an accurate and just standard english

(The english language is not a single unique thing, a proper noun, but a multiple, shared thing, a common noun. So, from now on it's english not English.)

We believe there are a number of things teachers in schools can do to foster what we call a "big smart english"—an english big because it encompasses many forms, usages and peoples; smart because it is based on recent understandings of language and its politics that will ultimately produce a more equitable and democratic language and culture. Let us close with some suggestions for the secondary and post-secondary classroom:

1) understand and value error. Many have encouraged students and teachers to see error as a sign of growth—the risk taking necessary for the development of language/literacy (Haswell; Weaver; Goodman and Burke). Yet the power of the standard still rules, even if it means which students will become less literate by enforcing it. Liberate your classroom from the wrong-headed imposition of anti-learning by the powerful and start teaching big smart english.

2) value and incorporate multi-cultural and marginalized speech and literature. The richness of the multi-cultural classroom (Dennis Wieland, a Sacramento teacher, told Don that he had 22 languages represented in his 12th grade classes) should allow students to become comfortable with wide standards. But published multi-cultural literature has been sterilized and standardized; so search for the published writing of marginalized peoples who have fought to publish in their voice, not in the sanitized voice of standard english. We must learn from their bravery and truth. Search contemporary literature and new journalism, especially small local magazines.

Also rely on student writing and transcripts of their speech as sources for reading and literature. Mix them with adolescent literature, popular literature and some of the canon and your classroom will reflect the democratic nature of big smart english.

3) support students' using big smart english. Once you have mixed a variety of literatures and englishes, encourage your students to experiment with big smart democratic english in their writing. When they do—praise!

4) evaluate and grade big smart english. Make sure students privately and publicly see that the teacher values and rewards big smart democratic english.

5) take political action to end the tryanny of standard English. Encourage intentional errors in standard form and usage, and then talk about 'em. And talk about big smart democratic english with colleagues, parents and administrators.

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## WOMEN AND E-MAIL: ISSUES OF GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY

by Pamela Takayoshi
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The use of electronic mail (e-mail) in the composition classroom has been suggested as a means of offering silenced and marginalized students a voice to use in group discussions and conversations, leading to power structures that differ from those of face-to-face interactions (Hartman, et al. 1991; Mabrito 1991; Selfe 1990; Spitzer 1989). Marilyn Cooper and Cindy Selfe give voice to the excitement and hopefulness of the computer's potential as a liberatory tool: "Students can experiment with and confront discourses in a less threatening context, one in which the teacher's authority to privilege or forbid discourses is not so absolute, and what matters is ideas, not personalities" (1990, 866). It has been suggested that computer networking opens up communication lines for students who have been silenced by traditional classroom discourse patterns. Additionally, networking offers the possibility of more equalitarian patterns of exchange among students.

The research concerns of the emerging studies of computers and composition parallel in part the concerns of liberal feminism. For example, the research in both areas addresses the marginality faced by many female students in the university, an experience described by Adrienne Rich in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence:* "Look at a classroom: look at the many kinds of women's faces, postures, expressions. . . . Listen to the silences, the unasked questions . . . the small, soft voices, often courageously trying to speak up, voices of women taught early that tones of confidence, challenge, anger, or assertiveness, are strident and unfeminine. . . . Listen to a woman groping for language in which to express what is on her mind, sensing that the terms of academic discourse are not her language" (1979, 243).

E-mail offers a voice to the silent female students of whom Adrienne Rich spoke. E-mail offers a place where a female student can communicate her ideas and make contributions to a conversation without being viewed as strident and unfeminine. Using e-mail, she will not have to grope for language to express what's on her mind, but instead can take time in expressing herself. In these terms, then, the computer promises an advance toward a solution for a very real and serious problem women face in the university setting.

As a female academic, I have struggled first hand with these issues of authority and "the female as other" in academic discourse. What I find so invigorating about the research on computer networking is the way this medium offers silenced students a voice and brings marginalized students into the mainstream. This optimism must be tempered with caution, however, and an examination of the way the reality measures up to the ideal.

## Reality vs. Theory

Talking with women about their actual experiences with e-mail, bulletin boards, and electronic conferences reveals a dissonance between reality and theory. While electronic communications can and do make certain things easier and better, the computer is not a panacea to the communications problems women have faced.

Over the course of five months, I looked at discussions on five e-mail conferences (both composition and women's studies interest groups), in an attempt to understand the experience of female participants. In addition to this, I asked users to relate incidents they've had with electronic communications that are illuminating of their experiences. I want to share some of those stories and make sense of what they tell us about the medium. Although I have organized my presentation around quotes from three of the women who responded, their statements speak also of the experiences of other women, echoing the responses of many others I received.

### *"It seems to me that it helps us to connect, in an increasingly isolated world"*

One of the positive comments most commonly heard about e-mail is that the medium is able to connect people with similar interest, thereby cutting feelings of isolation for many women. Being members of electronic conferences puts women in contact with others they normally would not have known. A physician, Maria, views e-mail as a means to lessening her feelings of isolation, remarking that "the number of feminist family physicians in the world is perilously small." Although Maria is aware of the work of feminists in other disciplines, she believes that, due to the specific nature of her work, they have no reason to know about her and what she does. Her e-mail account has put her in touch with others who are interested in her work. She says, "E-mail has made me feel as if I'm really part of something out there, [and] that there are other people with my values."

Likewise, participants on the women's studies bulletin boards find support from each other. Through e-mail, women can connect with colleagues across the country involved in similar projects and concerns that would be little acknowledged or respected at their universities. One woman academic sought support from bulletin board participants when she expressed her frustration as a member of a committee whose task was the revision of university-wide core requirements. As an untenured faculty member and one of only two women on a committee of 19, her ideas were not being heard, and she felt she had very little influence upon what happened. Through e-mail she articulated the problem: "The general response to my ideas is, 'Those of us who have been on this committee from the beginning [feel] . . . ' and other such patronizing comments. . . . As a member of this committee, I feel a sense of responsibility for what it does, yet I also feel vulnerable and powerless. Any suggestions on what to do would be welcomed."

In addition to the symbolic isolation many female students face, those in small rural towns face a physical isolation which can make them feel cut off from the rest of the world. This isolation can pose some serious research problems, a concern one woman expressed when she posted a request for information on citations more recent than 1984 (the date of the most recent source she could find in her limited library). Electronic bulletin boards and conferences can serve as a great resource for research information in fields where no bibliographies exist that are as comprehensive as the MLA Bibliography, for example, or as specialized as the CCCC Bibliography. Requests for information on particular subjects and citations are some of the most common postings on the five bulletin boards, but the requested information is not always research-related. One woman wrote that, through e-mail, she has been making attempts at being more open to different ways of thinking and that e-mail offers her "a forum for expression I may otherwise have not been exposed to."

A need exists for colleagues to be able to exchange stories and find advice on issues for which they may not receive support in their university settings, especially in areas of study that are still not considered disciplines by many universities. Electronic conferences often serve as a support system for female colleagues who feel alone in their endeavors and work. As one woman put it, "It seems to me that it helps us to connect, in an increasingly isolated world."

### *"The masculinist model of explanation is not user-friendly"*

Maria, the family physician introduced earlier, wrote that simply getting onto the system was problematic, voicing a concern that many women express. Upon receiving her e-mail account, she went to her university's computer center where she contacted a man who she characterized as "one of the most confusing explainers I have ever met." She faced a great deal of technical problems dealing with her account, problems she could solve only by contacting the people who had confused her to begin with. As a result of the little computer support she received, Maria feels her experiences point to a need for documentation that does not assume one is a "techie" to begin with, and she identifies the problem as "the masculinist model of explanation," one she explains as "teaching [that] doesn't start with what you know and need but by superimposing itself, often irrelevantly, on you."

Another respondent, Susan, echoed Maria's complaints about the lack of support she received when trying to connect to her e-mail account. A full professor in English, Susan was shuffled back and forth between consultants who alternately made her feel that she was at fault for not being able to connect to her account and that she was being bothersome for trying to find out why. After many attempts at doing what each consultant told her to do, Susan still could not get connected to the mainframe. When she returned to the computer center for further guidance, the consultant was terse and seemed to blame her for being unable to connect. In the end, the problem turned out not to be Susan's fault at all, but rather, the consultant's. The general feeling Susan had about the situation and the tone of the encounter led Susan to believe that the consultant treated her condescendingly simply because she was a woman.

Many women experienced similar problems with access and availability of computers hooked up to a mainframe. Some complained that using a computer hooked up to the mainframe required going onto the university campus after dark in order to use public facilities tht are tucked away in little trafficked and ill-lit buildings, reinforcing the notion that this is a man's world with no place for women to exist comfortably. A fear for their safety affects the experience women have in the public facilities once they arrive there. Adrienne Rich's discussion of women's going to the campus library at night puts this very real fear in women's lives into words: "If it is dangerous for me to walk home late in the evening from the library, because I am a woman and can be raped, how self-possessed, how exuberant can I feel as I sit working in that library? how much of my working energy is drained by the subliminal knowledge that, as a woman, I test my physical right to exist each time I go out?" (1979, 242).

My point is simply that computers and computer use for the most part have been developed without women and women's issues in mind. The numbers of women in science and technology are infinitesimally small. In fact, it has been suggested that the technology itself is patriarchally suspect. It has been seen as a way for men to exert power and control over their physical world, a world from which women are almost completely excluded, except in the role of support personnel. When women who are just beginning to use e-mail have had to move into that world to ask questions that show their ignorance of the subject, they have been made to feel bothersome, stupid, and "out of their element." Once again, they have been made to feel like "the other."

### *The medium has served as "just another way for men to try to pick up women"*

More serious than the difficulty that women face in learning the medium and getting support for that process, however, is the experience of women who have been sexually harassed through e-mail by men they may or may not know. A visiting fellow at a private university received a number of requests when she first got her account, asking if she was the same Anne Smith that the sender knew. When she responded that she was not, some of the male senders continued mailing messages trying to contact her, and one offered to be her pen pal. Her explanation of the situation was that "the senders seemed to feel that they had the right to send such messages and . . . that [my] being a woman . . . gave them license to."

Joyce Kinkead tells of a similar exchange between three students in her English 101 class. A male student sent a message to a female student that read: "Caught your user name . . . when you printed out your descriptive essay. Could we get together and collaborate? How about Friday? Yours, STUD." However, Stud mistakenly sent the note to a male student in the same class. Here is the response he got: "Dear Studmuffin, you got the wrong number! No collaboration here. I did write to FOX though and we're going out on Friday. Thanks! Not yours, STUD #2."

Kinkead says of this exchange, "Although our writing program does not encourage a dating game interface on electronic mail . . . we do not discourage it either . . . [because] we like our students to communicate through writing" (1987, 337). But what sort of discourse community is being established? How did "FOX" feel, one wonders, at being bandied about on the electronic network, not as an intellectual member of the class but as merely a female plaything and conquest for the "studs" in the class. What role does she play in a conference if even there, with the distinguishing characteristics of age and sex removed, she is responded to strictly in terms of her womanhood?

As a student in a graduate seminar, I was a participant on an electronic conference set up for the class (approximately ten students and the instructor). In the beginning, the electronic conference served as a place where we could continue conversations begun in class. As the course progressed and people became more involved in the electronic discussions, they became more than continuations of classroom conversations. The conference became a place to exchange ideas about things in general and get feedback on ideas we had been kicking around outside this particular seminar.

One day I logged on to the mainframe from one of the public terminals and found a note addressed to me personally from a male I did not know. The note read: "Pamela, I'm not really sure what all of your discussions are getting to, but it really turns me on. I just think it's really sexy. Love always, Bob."

My first reaction was surprised confusion because I did not understand what the note was about. Then I felt as though someone had been spying on me, looking over my shoulder while I did something private. And I got angry. Angry because once again I was being singled out as a woman in an arena I thought was strictly intellectual, in an environment where my physical characteristics were supposedly inconsequential, an environment where I erroneously thought I would be taken seriously for my thoughts and ideas. In some ways that angered me the most—the feeling that there was nowhere I could be considered as anything other than the cause of someone's sexual excitement. For these reasons, my postings to the conference virtually stopped for the remainder of the semester, although I was pretty sure I would not receive another note from "Bob." I had registered enough complaints that his teacher was found and made aware of the situation, and Bob was warned that should it happen again, he would permanently lose his e-mail account. Still, the attraction of the medium died for me that semester. When I would start to post something to the e-mail conference, I would think so hard about the *potential* audience, rather than the primary audience of my classmates, that I would find it difficult to word my ideas. I also never got over the feeling that I was on display, that somewhere out there this Bob person was watching what I was doing with particular and secret interest.

### Conclusion

The medium of e-mail certainly holds promise for propelling female students into the discourse of the classroom, with the hope that once their ideas are taken seriously in the electronic medium, their confidence in speaking will carry over into classroom discussion. But in a setting that supposedly removes markers of one's status in society, women are still identified, sometimes simply by their names, and placed in the same narrow categories into which they have always been placed. For example, the medium had offered me a voice, but when I used it, I found that once again I was merely objectified as a woman—man's sexual, but not intellectual, counterpart.

E-mail plays an important role in giving gifted but marginalized students an extra advantage they need in order to find their voices and take their place within our institutions of higher education. Before e-mail can achieve its potential, however, we must begin to address the problems identified by women's experience with electronic mail within the university. First, we must provide user-friendly support based upon an ethic of service and entitlement, one recognizing that women are full members of the academic community. Second, computer centers must be located in well-lit and patrolled areas of university campuses. And most importantly, sexual harassment through the use of electronic media—in any form whatsoever—must not be tolerated, and all precautions must be taken to preserve women's security and peace of mind. With a watchful eye toward feminist needs and concerns, e-mail and other computer-assisted forms of communication have the potential to provide women with the opportunity for a powerful and effective means of expression within the academic community.

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## A PRO-CHOICE CURRICULUM

by Carol Jago
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Student empowerment is a term often bandied about in meetings discussing the restructuring of schools, but I doubt that many teachers know what it looks like. The structure of most classrooms is authoritarian. The teacher has the power, and students must get with the program. The teacher sets the curriculum, and students read the texts. This unexamined contract incites unrest and even rebellion in teenagers; they resent being told what to do on principle. (If you don't believe me, ask the parent of any fifteen-year-old.) The students' attitude in turn causes teachers to remark, "Kids sure aren't like they used to be; There's no respect for authority around here; and, Students were much smarter in the 50s." The classroom becomes a battleground—teachers demonstrating that they can make students do what they want; students proving they cannot.

The only classroom model most teachers have ever known is teacher-dominated. Let students choose the books they read? Have students write their own essay prompts? Base grades upon students' self-assessment? Yes, all this and more.

Take poetry for example: As things stand, students almost never see poems the way they exist in the real world—either in readings by the author or in slim published volumes. I think this is a mistake and one reason why students think they hate poetry. Students should choose the poems they read, not just from an anthology (where an editor has already done the choosing) but from the actual books poets publish. Another reason why students think they hate poetry is that, under the current system, students only get to read the poems that English teachers like. Clearly ours is an acquired taste and one not naturally suited to fifteen-year-olds weaned on rap. I believe it is time for a pro-choice curriculum, one where students have a chance to do the choosing.

I begin my pro-choice poetry curriculum by filling the classroom with books of poetry, putting out everything from cowboy poems to Christina Rossetti. I borrow and beg, checking out entire shelves of poetry in the school library and then raiding local public libraries. I ask students to browse and read as their fancy takes them and then choose one poem to share with the whole class. They must read their poems aloud and briefly tell us why they chose their poems. Students gravitate to contemporary poets. They respond to the anger and the strong language. These are the books they ask to take home and the verses they copy out for their girlfriends and boyfriends. Some spend hours finding just the right poem; others choose to amuse or shock. Everyone participates in a pro-choice curriculum.

Students have brought to my attention spectacular poems I would never have found on my own. For example, one of my students brought to our attention the poetry of Wanda Coleman, a Los Angeles poet who writes dramatically of urban life in all its colors. (I am grateful to Wanda Coleman for permission to share her poem).

**TODAY I AM A HOMICIDE IN THE NORTH OF THE CITY**

on this bus to oblivion I bleed in the seat
numb silent rider
bent to poverty/my blackness covers me like the
american flag over the coffin of some hero killed in action
unlike him i have remained unrecognized, unrewarded
eyes cloaked in the shroud of hopelessness
search advancing avenues for a noisy haven
billboards press against my face
reminders of what i can't afford to buy
laughing fantasies speed past in molded steel luxury
i get off at a dark corner
and in my too tight slacks
move into the slow graceful mood of shadow
i know my killer is out there

from *African Sleeping Sickness*

The girl who chose this poem said that she liked "Today I Am a Homicide in the North of the City" because it upset her. As my students each read the poems they chose and explained the reasons for their choices, I charted the generalization implied by their reasons, i.e., surprising rhythms, strong emotions, concrete descriptions, clever rhymes. With thirty-five of their own reasons for liking poems up on the board, I did not have to strong-arm students into reading more. It seemed a reasonable thing to do.

Building upon their first choices, I asked my students to compile their own anthologies of poetry. I stipulated that their collections must have a theme, for example "War," "Moving," "Food," and must include their own definition of poetry. Many students turned to poems they heard their classmates read. Others wanted to include poetry they had written themselves. They copied and xeroxed, illustrated, and cut and pasted. I said "yes" to whatever questions/suggestions they had—a poem my friend from Oklahoma wrote? song lyrics? an anthology mobile? Yes. The product was truly theirs, not simply a dutiful rendering of my assignment. As I read their personal definitions of poetry, I realized that a pro-choice poetry unit might ultimately make them readers and lovers of the form. Let me quote three male students, since high school poetry classes have tended traditionally to be regarded as the domain of females.

Craig Arcella wrote, "Poetry is a form of writing that says things in ways that normal writing can't. Poets have freedom."

Dema Salim found that, "Poetry can do one thing that most other types of writing can't. It can say something that will not affect you until later. Later can be an hour or even a couple of years."

Aric Jensen said, "Sometimes poetry criticizes the world. That's what most of my own poetry is about. My friends enjoy it because it helps relieve tension between them by exposing their faults in a way that doesn't infuriate them. I feel that I better understand them and myself after writing one."

To mine eyes, these are empowered students. When all students can choose, clichés break down.

## *MACBETH* AND SENSE OF SELF

by Terrie St. Michel
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"So, Ms. St. Michel, how does it feel to be a minority?" These were the first words spoken by the first student to address me in my first English class—remedial "contemporary" literature (with an emphasis on writing) for juniors. I stood in front of my new students, my blue eyes staring blankly, realizing the accuracy of the question posed, and feeling at a loss for words (not a good sign for a "teacher of English"). I replied as honestly as I could, "I hadn't noticed. People are people to me, and I look at them for *who* they are, not what *color* they are. Hmmm, guess maybe I should pay more attention. . . ." The student who had been looming (he was 6′3″) in the front row two feet from my desk (which I was leaning against for moral support) smiled and then quietly took his seat. The other students seemed to relax a bit, and I could feel some color returning to my own pale face. And so, I had "passed" my first test in urban education and learned an important key for interacting with my students: Honesty, directness, and open sharing of what I thought was critical to eliciting any kind of trust on their part ("Moments of Truth and Teaching *Pygmalion*." *Staff Development Case Studies*. San Francisco: Far West Laboratories, February, 1990).

That "incident" occurred eight years ago during my second year of teaching and my first year at an inner-city high school where the students were a striking contrast to those from my past. During my student teaching I had followed my own "roots" and found myself teaching in an upper-middle class, predominantly white high school. The students who seemed "to have everything" took *me* to lunch and dinner (after all, I was paying my own way through college) and laughed at my "but it's paid for" mode of transportation. After my student teaching experience, I found myself in a small, remote copper-mining town located several hundred miles from any major city. The population—at least 85 percent Hispanic—was made up of third and fourth generation copper-miner families. These students had little desire to leave their cocooned environment, and I felt isolated and alone. In short, I was eager to leave after one year, and I resolved to myself to "take whatever I could find." "Whatever" turned out to be an English position at an inner-city high school teaching three different preps of remedial classes ranging from freshman to sophomores to juniors. That first day I sat alone in my faded, lime-green classroom with its torn black-out curtains, chipped plaster, and graffiti-covered desktops, and I thought, "What have I done?" I did not cry (in those days I still believed one had to act as though one were in control and on top of things), but I paced and chewed my bottom lip until it was a bloody mess.

### Discovering My Self

The students at this inner-city high school were the same as students in similar urban settings: Most were at the poverty level economically; many became teenage mothers and fathers; over 85 percent of the student population were nonwhite; the dropout rate hovered somewhere around 18 percent; and, attendance was another problem as absenteeism soared as high as 30-plus percent. The students' backgrounds would point out deficiencies in their home environments, such as almost nonexistent parental supervision and support. Many of these students were floundering, left to persevere as best they could—alone.

I was not sure what I was going to do, but my years of playing competitive volleyball and coaching came to my rescue and lifted my waning hopes. Even though my major was physical education and I taught physical education for only one year, without that experience I might never have pushed my limits and challenged the structure of the classroom setting. I remember saying to myself, "Well, Terrie, here's your greatest challenge to date. If you can coach a volleyball team to winning the State Championship, then you can coach a class into coming to school and earning passing grades." At that moment I knew things would be okay, but I didn't know how.

I knew these were kinesthetically-oriented students who interacted with each other and their environment physically; their school still has the highest percentage of fights and personal assaults in the state. These kids push and shove, run and jump, and keep up a constant energetic output. Getting them to sit in a desk is a daily challenge, never mind sitting still. Reading, writing, and discussing are perceived by these students to be passive activities. I knew how to get my students to move physically, but I was at a loss for how to move them mentally. Moving into a classroom where textbooks, binders, and ink pens replaced racquets, balls, and nets caused me to feel stifled, confined, and restricted; after all, teaching physical education is a hands-on activity, one where students learn by *doing*. So, how does a physical education teacher engage students in mental activities that involve teamwork, individual excellence, and energetic output in the context of literature?

My initial response was, "Read pages . . . Answer questions . . . This assignment is due . . ." In fact, I spent my first three years of teaching English trying to do all the things I thought I should do, ought to do, or must do according to the policies and procedures set by the school and the district. The silence in the classroom grew, as did my frustration. As my students' responses toward me became more and more indifferent, I started asking questions and looking for activities that would engage my students in the learning process in such a way that the students would become a part of what they were learning rather than disassociated bystanders simply going through the motions.

What I began to discover was that my students had opinions, desires, questions, and abilities that they wanted to explore and expand but did not know how to. And, I found, my students' wants could be aligned with the shoulds, oughts, and musts imposed by the school and district. The core of this discovery ultimately presented itself as a need for my students to know and to be able to use their own resources and potential. When my students demonstrated a sense of their self, then the threat of learning—of "not knowing"—diminished, freeing them to ask their questions and take risks, to *want* to try new things, accepting that "failure" at a task was simply a statement about not having enough information to complete the task as required, rather than a statement about their intelligence. In short, "urban" or not, they were kids in my classroom.

### Teaching Self Discovery

Beginning a process of self-discovery, however, proved intimidating, and the newness of such a "classroom" activity brought suspicion and hesitancy. Their first responses to my enthusiastic gushings of "We're going to do something new!" were anything but encouraging—"Oh, great." But I persevered.

"What do you know about you?"

"What's it to you, baby?"

"These activities are going to be *fun*, and I think you might discover a few surprises along the way."

"Come on, Ms. St. Michel, this isn't English. When are we going to use those gray books?"

"The grammar textbooks?"

"Yeah. We're supposed to be doing 'lessons'."

"We'll get to it, but for right now I want you to try this. All I'm asking is that you give me three days of your time to try something new, and if you still hate it at the end of three days, we'll put it away and go back to doing 'lessons' out of your grammar books, okay? Three days, that's a reasonable request. Besides, if you show up each day for three days and do the different activities I have planned for you, I'll give each of you an 'A.' Just for being here and trying something new, okay?" "An 'A' just for being here?"

"And doing the activities I have planned."

[silence]

"It's a deal. Remember, you said 'A.' "

"Yes. An 'A.' "

As Whoopi Goldberg says in her one-woman show, "If you want people to buy your product, you've got to give them a little taste first." Well, I wanted my students to buy into education and getting good grades and trying new things, so I was "giving them a little taste" by guaranteeing them a grade of "A" in exchange for three days of exploring the unknown. The idea had popped into my head as I stood there, looking at their defiant faces and wondering, "How do I get in?" Although I believe grades are nothing more than artificial devices that have lost their usefulness, it was all I really had to bargain with. Three days would not make much difference in their overall grades if they did nothing more than that, but those three days were an entrance for me, an opportunity to give them a new experience and to see if they could fly. Plus, the idea of an "easy 'A' " seemed to appeal to them; it was a kind of challenge, to see if I would actually go through with it.

### Rapport and Self

Rapport became the key to opening doors within each student, and establishing rapport became my challenge. To me, rapport is a process of communication that is harmonious and in synch—it is resonance between two or more individuals. Maintaining rapport is a way to synchronize the different experiences, values, and meanings of human beings. Rapport can accentuate similarities and downplay differences so that understanding between people can be increased. Each student had to feel that he or she was valued and accepted where he or she was at that moment, and that it was okay to "not know." Emphasizing genuine caring for each student and assuring them that I was on "their side" became my priority. After all, how does a teacher go about asking students to share of themselves when they do not quite know who they are? At what point does a teacher become a "person" to whom students want to open up? I did not have all the answers, but I did have three days to try and find a few.

My goal was to help my students begin to discover patterns and connections within themselves by using their individual resources. My first task was to project a sensitive awareness of how my students perceived the process of education and learning; I wanted them to know that I understood how they felt and would not judge them according to *my* perceptions.

Carl Rogers said that there should be a place for learning by the whole person, where feelings and ideas could merge. In creating a learning environment which fostered this concept of mergence, I began asking questions: What is the Self? What are the benefits of learning about one's Self? How does one go about developing a sense of Self?

The Self has been defined in a variety of ways, but I chose this definition: The Self is the best elements of our own being, the most reassuring aspect of our own inner strengths, our personal expression that links us with everything else that exists—it is our connection to the enormous resources of the human potential; it is our experiences—the real truth that lies within us.

The benefits of accessing one's Self are numerous. In my opinion, the greatest gain is in having personal power—the power to create and *do*. Personal power means having *choice*, and choice *is* power. When we know our strengths we can emphasize them. When we know our weaknesses we can develop them. As we bring together our "pieces" we can examine specifically how we can create balance in our lives. Knowing one's Self allows each person to create health, sanity, and well-being, and from that base we can have all that we desire because we then have personal power and choice in every aspect of our lives.

Learning about one's Self can be as simple as formulating questions: What are the five most important things I want to accomplish during my lifetime? What four qualities do I like best about myself? What two things would I like to change about myself? What do I think of myself? What is it I have forgotten about myself? What am I aware of internally? externally? What is my evidence for how I know what I know? How can I test what I know? Who taught me how to think? Who taught me how to learn? What's new and interesting in my life? How do I create my memory? How important is my life, to me? What is my value? What have I done for myself lately? Et cetera.

The unit I compiled to help my students begin to discover "pieces" of themSelves presents a variety of activities (ranging from handwriting analysis to time management strategies to body types) that seem to be interesting to my students because they are at a point in their lives where they are discovering the "who," "what" and "how" they are. I emphasize to my students that each activity is only a beginning and can be expanded. Specific attention is spent on setting goals and describing the steps necessary for achieving those goals. Time management strategies, learning techniques, and motivational traits are emphasized throughout the unit in order to provide my students with a strong sense of capability in educational as well as personal settings.

Doing the activities in my *Developing a Sense of Self* unit is like putting together a puzzle, one where not all the pieces are presented, one where a person must add his or her own unique pieces, evaluating the validity and usefulness in his or her own life. The idea behind this unit is simply making students curious about themSelves and asking questions because they want to know. As I come across new information I incorporate it into the unit. Again, it is critical to emphasize that these are only "pieces"—hints and possibilities. The unit has grown from one week of various exploratory activities to a three-week unit that culminates in compiling and then discussing a personal-profile portfolio.

Better understanding of themSelves has encouraged my students to become active participants in the learning process—helping to formulate test questions, grading each other's papers with concern for helping rather than humiliating, investing more honestly in discussions and sharing their own feelings, relating their experiences to the content, forming a community of learners who work together and notice each other, taking responsibility for their own choices, and more readily accepting challenges. In short, their learning experience is more personally fulfilling because they are investing more of their person in the learning process.

This year I moved my *Developing a Sense of Self* unit to the fall semester. I have realized that the sooner I can gain real, useable, applicable information about my students, the better I can plan my lessons and the more empathetic I can be of their experiences as they move within the learning process. I am more available to help them when they struggle and elated when they accomplish their goals or understand some new piece. I ultimately find it easier to meet the needs of my students and do a more thorough job of meeting those needs when I have a broader understanding of my students as individuals.

### *Macbeth* and Urban Gangs

The greatest impact I have noticed has come in reference to teaching particularly difficult content such as literature, specifically, *Macbeth.* For the urban student population with whom I primarily interact, Shakespeare's language is very difficult to read and interpret. Anything isolated and disassociated from my students' personal existence (everyday life) is lost on them. I have found integration and assimilation occurs more readily when "lessons" can be attached to my students' own experiential reference base.

My introduction for teaching *Macbeth* has changed, from "Tomorrow we will start our next three-week unit by reading Shakespeare's play, *Macbeth*" (which resulted in a mass exodus and three weeks of individualized instruction for the four or five students who "always came to class") to starting the unit by refreshing my students' memories first with their sense of Self profiles—reminding them of their personal power in having choice and their knowledge that they can impact their own world. Having reminded my students that we are all human beings who share a common reference of Self, though we are all unique, I reestablish rapport with my students and assure them that it is okay to "not know," that learning is a *process* and my responsibility as the "teacher" is to guide them through this new learning experience.

We read the play aloud, noting similarities between Macbeth—his life, his personal power, his sense of Self, his choices—and my students, asking questions such as, How would you describe Macbeth's sense of Self in the beginning of the play? How does Macbeth perceive himself? Can you think of a person on campus who acts like Macbeth? How are these two alike?

As we continue reading the play, and Macbeth begins to rely more and more heavily on the witches' predictions and succumbs to Lady Macbeth's badgering, I ask my students to discuss the changes in Macbeth's sense of Self. I ask them to consider whether Macbeth's original expression of Self was "real" or manufactured. Then my students are asked to relate peer pressures, specifically gang influences, by responding to, "How do peers/gang members resemble Macbeth? Who do gang members listen to? Who do gang members succumb to? [Answer: gang leaders] What kinds of actions do gang members take as a result of listening to others?" [Answer: They steal and wear certain clothing, "colors," for example.] These discussions precede writing assignments in which the students present their perceptions and explain their observations.

After we have finished reading the play, we discuss Macbeth's downfall. We talk about how Macbeth, who presented a presence of strength and self-assuredness in the beginning, changed throughout the play until he ends up dead. We discuss the difference between ego and true personal power, between pseudo-self and real sense of Self. I pose questions such as "Do gang members sometimes end up getting killed because of their lack of Self and their inability to make choices for themselves? Is having a sense of Self worthwhile? Is it a tragic flaw not to have a sense of Self?" Again, writing is used as the primary forum for students to explain their ideas.

My students have come to conclusions, such as: "Macbeth's lack of Self caused him to pay too much attention to prophecy and he was influenced by others to such a degree that he no longer made decisions for himself. Gang members also experience the same kind of downfall as Macbeth when they start listening to others without asking questions. They violate their own criteria and sometimes end up dead. Knowing one's Self means you make your own choices and follow what you know to be right and true based on your own personal, internal ethics." These are powerful statements with understood connections being referenced.

### Interactive Learning

When students can relate to learning with their own experiences, when learning is personalized, then students are more receptive and willing to explore those areas they have little or no personal reference for. Writing is one of the most sophisticated skills students can learn, and this complex process is enhanced when it is made meaningful and real. Ultimately, learning is an interactive process without end—a continuous journey. Enhancement of the learning process can be facilitated by attachment to personal experience and making content relevant to each student. Each of us interprets text, experiences, interactions in our own unique way which adds the dimension of realness for each of us. The greatest impact, however, has been my modeling of my own development of Self and emphasizing that I, too, am learning and participating *with* my students in the process of being alive.

During my nine years of teaching I have begun to realize the importance and energy required to create and maintain rapport with my students. Even when the subject matter is difficult or uninspiring to my students, with good rapport I have found that anything can be "sold." When there is a moment of truth, a moment of acknowledging others, then learning and desire to discover follow. Caring, maintaining rapport, and actively participating mentally as well as physically contribute to the wholeness of our development and expression as human beings—the what and how we embrace life, the only real experience any of us embodies—rather than expediting our deaths through a lack of Self and a listlessness for life. As teachers, we have a tremendous impact on our students and infinite opportunities for enhancing learning. It is my opinion that by enriching each student's sense of Self, we can better meet the needs of our students and fulfill the promise of education, and the quality of life is enhanced when we know how to think and are excited by the opportunities to experience and participate in being alive and discovering our latent human potentials through the development of ourSelves.

# Book Review

### James M. Cahalan and David B. Downing, *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1992.

by William F. Williams
Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

There is clearly a need for James Cahalan and David Downing's *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses:*

The theoretical movement in literature studies away from New Criticism has not been followed by a corresponding pedagogical change in literature classes. In other words, teachers of literature classes have not changed what they do on Monday morning, despite a complete rewriting of theoretical work, despite a reconsideration of what professional writing about literature should be, and despite a far reaching and polemic debate about the very content of literary studies carried on over the last two decades.

The pedagogical technique resulting from New Critical theory is identified with what Paulo Freire labeled "the banking model of education," a model that puts the teacher in control of what constitutes knowledge, value, and correctness. Cahalan and Downing argue that the discipline should make methodological changes to reflect theoretical changes, should replace the "banking model" with a model that empowers students, not teachers. In their words, "the essayists share a belief in the necessity of new and liberating pedagogical strategies" (p. 9).

Cahalan and Downing seem to sidestep an inherent problem with a practice-defined-by-new-theory justification. At the time of the 1985 Penn State Conference on Composition, Stanley Fish argued that many composition theorists and teachers were upset because the much-touted paradigm shift would not produce the desired and expected change in classroom methodology. Fish argued convincingly that "practice has nothing to do with theory, at least in the sense of being enabled and justified by theory" (1989, 355). His argument is as relevant for introduction to literature considerations as it is for composition courses.

According to his tightly reasoned and persuasive argument, Fish points out that "judging or doing judging is one thing and giving accounts or theories of judging is another" (1989, 378). We could easily paraphrase the quote to say that "teaching or doing teaching is one thing and giving accounts or theories about teaching is another." Cahalan and Downing's book is in the business of giving accounts or theories about teaching, and as such, neither enables nor justifies "new and better" Monday mornings in front of an Introduction to Literature class.

Nevertheless, *Practicing Theory in Introductory College Literature Courses,* despite its questionable theoretical justification, provides an interesting collection of essays about teaching and about teacher/student interactions. The editors provide a strong introduction to the collection in which they point out the value of the sections of the book. For example, they say that the contributors to the first section "share a belief in the need to reorient students from passive consumption of authoritarian teacherly meanings to active involvement and participation in meaningful activities" (p. 9). The essays in the section vary, but each attempts to link reader-response criticism (itself a problematic term) to classroom activities. David Bleich's "Reading from Inside and Outside of One's Community" appeals to me most because it includes student voices and shows us the actual productions of students in response to a concrete assignment.

For the sixth section, they pick three essays that bring poststructuralist textual theories into the classroom, despite their difficulties. Thomas McLaughlin argues that poststructuralist theorists have as "one of their goals the unmasking of the ideological effects of ordinary language" (p. 263), and subsequently, texts written by poststructuralists tend to be difficult. However, more recent attempts have been made to "mainstream" the theories to make them accessible to undergraduates, and McLaughlin argues that students are ready to deploy the strategies of analysis from poststructuralist theories.

As well as providing an interesting group of essays "about" the teaching of introduction to literature classes, the editors conclude the book with a useful bibliographic essay, attempting, with all due caution, to offer a brief overview of theory as it should impact pedagogy. In the essay, Cahalan and Downing point out the important contributors to each category of criticism, an invaluable aid to someone trying to enter theory discourse.

Finally, I found the book provocative and stimulating. The discussion of theory reflects the current state of thinking about teaching in the discipline of English. Informed practice and teacher talk, although perhaps not directly responsible for changed classrooms, can provide ideas for change and support the desire for change.

**Work Cited**

Fish, S. 1989. "Anti-Foundationalism, Theory Hope, and the Teaching of Composition." *Doing What Comes Naturally.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

# Software Review

## MULTIMEDIA AND THE PROMISE OF THE YEAR 2000

by Wendy Paterson
Buffalo State College, New York

Teachers of English have just gotten used to the joys of teaching composition on a word processor, perhaps even experimenting with teaching reading with the use of a computer, hoping that would make them computer literate. But, alas, stasis is as impossible in the world of computer technology as it is in the teaching of English.

Remember the times when the filmstrip projector jammed, or the movie projector started burning the frame in the middle of *Tale of Two Cities?* Remember the "media specialists" (who also worked as the stage crew) who used to be responsible for showing you how to set up the movie screen without having it fall in a trembling heap of metal and canvas on your head? Those days of mystery and madness are over. Teachers now have access to, and therefore implied responsibility for, using multimedia to address the many types of "brainedness" of today's television generation. It seems to me that the most vexing part of being an educator/computer specialist is the lack of time and training to keep up with a field that changes almost daily, so we must forge ahead to the new technological innovations of the 90s—multimedia, preparing ourselves for the time when it hits the schools.

Most teachers have never seen, let alone used, multimedia—"videogames for education" variously identified in computer jargon as "hypermedia," "interactive videodisc," "CD-ROM," "Quicktime," "barcode," "desktop publishing," "electronic bulletin boarding," and "Discus Books." To work your way through this morass of media, either give up your teaching job to work for corporate America or urge your school district to devote at least some professional development money to investigate the use of hypermedia in teaching and learning.

As one who continues to maintain a healthy fear of learning anything that computer jocks talk about at lunchtime, I have entered this world out of necessity and admittedly out of curiosity. The field of multimedia is far too diverse for me to describe in the narrow confines of a column, but to demystify what seems close to science fantasy, I offer you these scenarios:

You are teaching Mark Twain. You would like your students to identify anecdotes that reveal "Huck Finn's" character. You might teach a laborious lesson on character development and ask them to search the text (probably in vain). Or you can use a $35 commercially produced videodisc of Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, employing a barcode reader and using prepared barcode labels affixed to your lesson that will show these anecdotes in living color, lending both texture and excitement to your lesson.

You are trying to help your freshman composition students to see the difference between factual and editorial prose. You decide that one way to do this is to simulate the writing of newspaper articles, and you would like to use their computers to facilitate this event. After purchasing a desktop presentation or publishing program, such as Microsoft's "Powerpoint," or Aldus' "Persuasion," you can not only show (with a new color LCD projector) how such a product is created by simulating the process, but you can allow your students to produce such a professional "paper" that they may never wish to use traditional means again.

You have taught Sherlock Holmes stories in every way imaginable. You need something fresh, something "Elementary, my dear Watson" (which he never really said). You want your students to develop research skills, learning how to search for information, ask pointed questions, and draw conclusions from informed investigation (sounds like Holmes, eh what?). You send each student on a personal and individual quest for clues and evidence to support their conclusions by using a CD-ROM "The Complete Sherlock Holmes" with a Hypercard stack which allows the student to "interact" with the text.

You have a small number of Spanish-speaking students in your English class. In discussions about the literature the class is reading, they seem totally lost. You suggest that these students work individually on a "Discus" version of your text before class discussion, a multimedia tool that allows the student to see and hear the book in both Spanish and English, with a glossary entry for each word, accessible with the touch of a mouse button.

Have I piqued your interest? These are not fantasies from Apple's latest "The World of the Future"; these scenarios are happening in classrooms across the country. So why not in yours? Why is the technological know-how that produced such modern wonders as cellular phones and desktop computers only the purview of business? Why are videodiscs that hold over 70,000 slides and movie stills per side only used in kiosks at the airport? Why is the only place you use CD-ROM in database searches in the library? Is there something CBS knows that the classroom teacher doesn't?

I do not expect that every teacher will run out to purchase a personal Macintosh LC with CD-ROM reader, videodisc player, "Quicktime" memory compression software and camcorder card (that's right, camcorder information can now be directly used and manipulated by a computer). I do hope, though, that even we "text-jockeys" can begin to explore the ways that technology and media can enhance the presentation of subjects in the humanities as they have in science and math. Perhaps by making our peace with these friendly—albeit intimidating—creatures of software and hardware, we can spread our excitement about education in the humanities and the subsequent advancement of the human condition that has long taken a financial backseat to the push for "better scores" in science and math. Isn't it time that we stopped encouraging the post-Sputnik production of a plethora of fledgling corporate executives and engineers who know a lot about the finances and physics that go into building bridges, but nothing about the nature of the people who will use them? Multimedia is not a concept that should be left in the darkness of an instructional resource department's closet. It should become a convenient and necessary tool for teachers, exalted as a positive step in the development of literacy much as was the invention of the printing press.

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS—PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always welcomed.

Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In particular, upcoming issues will have these themes:

October 1993 (July 1 deadline):
**The Other Side of the Desk: Teachers in Other Roles; On the Job, After School, In the Community**

February 1994 (November 1 deadline):
**Practical Advice, Strategies, and Suggestions**

May 1994 (February 1 deadline):
**Best and the Brightest: Innovation and Teaching**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25 or 3.5 inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced typed copy. Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor, *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326. (FAX 412-738-2098)

## GREAT BEGINNINGS

The Conference on English Leadership (CEL) of NCTE invites educators at all levels of instruction to submit short chapters for a volume on "Great Beginnings: Designs for Beginning Teachers." CEL encourages contributions from department chairs, supervisors or administrators of teachers K–12, instructors in teacher preparation programs, first- and second-year teachers, teachers working with student teachers, mentors in mentor/intern programs, experienced teachers, teachers who are thinking of leaving the profession.

Articles are invited that focus on such topics as

- What works and what is missing in making the first- or second-year teacher's life meaningful
- Successful supervision strategies for encouraging outstanding beginning teachers to remain in the profession
- Creating a supportive teaching community
- Personal experiences of a first-, second-, or third-year teacher
- Reentering the classroom
- An experienced teacher looking back

Manuscripts can range in length from 5–12 double-spaced pages. Two copies of each manuscript should be submitted. Name, address, school affiliation, and telephone numbers should be included on the title page. Editorial correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to Ira Hayes, CEL Monograph, Syosset High School, Syosset, New York 11791. (PHONE: 516-364-5675, FAX 516-921-6032)

**Manuscript deadline: January 1, 1994**

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# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

Conference on English Leadership

Volume 15, Number 3
October 1993
Editor: James Strickland

## In This Issue

### OUR PROFESSIONAL ROLE

by James Strickland, editor

Lately, our local papers have been filled with angry letters to the editor, complaining about the school board's efforts to fund the school budget by raising taxes. Most of the anger has been directed toward the teachers, suggesting that they take pay cuts and fund their own health coverage. The letter writers frequently complain that teachers are overpaid for a job that gets them home by 3:00 p.m. and only obliges them to work 180 days of the year. The letter writers further object to being taxed because, unlike the teachers, they are hard-working people who put in 40-hour work weeks, 12 months a year.

This characterization of teachers is what I think of as the blue-collar image of the teacher—the person who shows up for work in time for coffee and homeroom, meets with classes, has lunch and a 45-minute break for planning/correcting homework, and is out of the parking lot long before rush hour. There probably are a number of teachers who see themselves and their jobs this way, but the teachers I know see themselves as professionals, the white-collar image of the teacher. These teachers are in their offices early in the morning, sometimes for meetings, other times to do professional work—writing, preparing committee work, performing activities for state and national organizations such as NCTE, and participating in commissions and conferences. These professionals teach their own classes and share their time and expertise with colleagues, especially preservice and new teachers. These teachers participate in student activities and community organizations, often returning to school at night, and spend other nights at home responding to student work, planning a framework for the next day's activities, and catching up on their reading of professional journals. The taxpayers have no idea how hard these teachers work for their pay, probably because these teachers do not work for pay. They are professionals; they work for an idea, a vision of what learning is all about. These people teach students, not subjects.

The authors of the articles in this issue provide examples of some of the many activities or roles that define the professional teacher.

Wendy Bishop and Sandra Gail Teichmann, both of Florida State University, contribute "A Tale of Two Writing Teachers" as a sort of linked essay telling the story of two teachers who wrote with each other and with their students, drafting and sharing essays in class workshop sessions. The two women shared an interwoven semester; Wendy had been the graduate teacher of Sandra, the other teacher, who while enrolled in Wendy's advanced writing workshop was teaching her own initial first-year writing class. Both believe, as professionals committed to learning, that there should be no distinction between teacher and student; thus, both became full participants in their classes and they share with us (sometimes, confess to us) what it means to be a learner in one's own writing class.

Carol Jago discovered that her role as a professional included educating the community at large, reaching them through her local newspaper, writing a regularly published, thought-provoking column on education. The cutline at the end of Carol's column identifies her this way: "Carol Jago has taught in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District in California for 19 years.

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She is currently English department chair at Santa Monica High School and director of the California Literature Project at UCLA." The newspaper should add one more line—"and she is someone who knows what she's talkin' about."

Jan Morgenstern, who teaches at the Mercer County Career Center in Pennsylvania, decided that as a teacher of adult literacy she would use materials chosen for their relevance to her learners' needs instead of the prescribed reading series. While others see themselves as trained technicians carrying out a planned sequence of activities, Jan had the courage to use approaches based on the philosophy of whole language, making the reading meaningful for her students. One student, a 40-year-old man, wanted to read so that he could follow recipes and learn to bake. Jan decided to have him read cookbooks. Months later he came to class with a smile on his face and a loaf of bread in his hands that he, as an independent recipe reader, had baked himself.

Bill Murdick, a member of the English department at California University of Pennsylvania, sees being a professional as collaborating with colleagues across other disciplines. Bill approached four colleagues in the art department, suggested the idea of using writing and active learning strategies in their art classes, and promised to act as their mentor, offering guidance in theory and practice throughout the experience. It wasn't only the students who benefitted from their efforts; all five colleagues grew as learners and teachers. His article reflects on what they discovered.

October is a good time to reaffirm our professional role.

## A TALE OF TWO WRITING TEACHERS

### Tale One: Writing with a Writing Workshop

by Wendy Bishop
Florida State University

This year I put my preaching to the test: I vowed that I would write all semester along with my advanced composition class, a combined graduate and upper-division course titled Article and Essay Writing Workshop.

For several years I had completed a portion of the work I assigned to my students, more it seemed when I taught poetry, and often to model; for instance, I write along when orchestrating in-class writings. I had read Maxine Hairston (1986) and Jim Corder (1989), both of whom deplore writing teachers' lack of involvement in class writing (both of whom encourage, at the same time, teachers to write and share their writing). I knew about the success of National Writing Projects in transforming writing teachers into writers. As a professional writer, I had even proposed a method for teachers to experiment semester-long with writing (Bishop 1990). I had tried *parts* of my plan, but I had never been as disciplined as I wished, failing to keep up *all* semester, never quite fully becoming a member of my writing workshop.

This year I practiced a bit more, completing to some degree four-fifths of the semester's writing, producing and sharing that work, on time. I was also able to swap insights with a new graduate teaching assistant of first-year writing—Sandra—who was enrolled in the advanced writing workshop. After training to teach writing in a seminar with me the previous summer, Sandra had decided to do the same thing—write with her first-year college students. She composed her papers for my graduate-level class (Article and Essay Writing) according to her own class topics and demands (Freshman Composition). Early in the semester, we agreed to write about our parallel and overlapping experiences. Partway through the semester, I had the pleasure of visiting her first-year writing classroom, sharing drafts with a group of her students. In her essay, Sandra tells more about this experience from the classroom viewpoint.

This essay, then, is the last paper due—from me—for my own class.

**Advanced Writing**

Briefly, I need to describe the class design for the Article and Essay Workshop. Overall, I asked the class, as advanced writers, to focus on experimentation (in style, content, and/or form) and risk-taking (choosing something we knew would be challenging—attempting more than just schoolwriting, trying an unfamiliar genre, tackling an important but difficult to tell family story, writing into or against academic conventions, trying to excel in our weakest genre or style, and so on). To do this, a portion of the final grade would reward risk-taking (20%) and paper topics had to be self-assigned. I asked us all to produce semester contracts, listing three papers that would be written (and several alternates in case main choices would not work) with the understanding that one of the first two papers would undergo a "radical" revision (and count as the fourth class paper); the radical revision would also assure some degree of rewarded experimentation. Next, I needed to loosen genre conventions to assure experimentation, broadening our definition of essay writing and imaginative writing: I encouraged multi-genre writing. Finally, graduate students in this combined class were asked to write an additional paper, to be shared with me during conferences and aimed toward professional publication.

Writing a balanced yet challenging self-assignment contract can seem difficult for some students. Even in an advanced writing class, a few students would have preferred that I pick the topics and dole out the grades. Because I planned to be a fully-functioning class member, I used the contract-setting week (while we were exploring through freewriting and invention exercises) to share my own developing contract and to model my own class participation, showing the ease with which a contract could be set up (and later—by mutual agreement—modified). Ideas for contracts were shared in small group discussions and in conference with me, and then students were asked to memo me about their semester plan, providing me with two copies. I responded with notes to the memo and kept one copy for my files (see the Appendix).

I proposed to write pieces that I needed to write that semester or pieces I had put off and wanted to write, to show the class the breadth of my own professional work. This desire came from my determination to share my "real" writing with the class, texts I wanted and needed to produce professionally, since my own academic writing always surprises me with its

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*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

memos to poems to essays to lists to almost anything. This desire also grew from my own developing beliefs about writing: that there are important commonalities in writing no matter the genre, that writers write to self-imposed as well as other-imposed tasks and that both sorts of tasks can be productive and instructive, that moving from one type of writing to another type of writing can free writers to view their process(es) in new ways, and so on.

The first essay I proposed for myself was intentionally the riskiest one I planned to write all semester because I wanted to encourage other class writers to take chances with their prose and to view me as a class member who was also taking chances: I would write about my mother's mental illness and my feelings about growing up with her. For my second piece, I decided to write part of a mystery novel. Popular genre writing would challenge me and fulfill a desire to write the type of book I read for an evening's pleasure. My third piece would be an academic essay, and then I would need to write a radical revision of my family piece or my mystery chapter before completing a final essay (this one) outside of class time.

In this advanced writing workshop, the first three class papers were printed up in class books at a local copy shop and shared in class during workshops. The radical revision (as well as paper five for graduate students) would be collected in final portfolios.

### Writing with/for the Class

Essay one, about my mother, was, as expected, hard to write but for reasons different than I had predicted. I did manage to discover things through the draft, to incorporate several genres (by quoting from my poems and fiction about my family), and to experiment with extended metaphor and also with alternative stylistic strategies that Winston Weathers calls Grammar B techniques (1980). Grammar B techniques, explains Weathers, have always been explored by literary authors but rarely taught in the classroom. William Blake, Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, Gertrude Stein, and more recently Tom Wolfe, have all, in selected works, capitalized on Grammar B, using fragments and labyrinthine sentences, synchronicity, collage, and crots—prose passages broken by white space or asterisks that may be only loosely associated with one another (we read Weathers's work for this class).

I only wrote two drafts though, each late at night the evening before the essay was due. Normally, I never write in the evening. Yet I learned I could draft something at 8:00 p.m., the end of a long work day filled with the running of a composition program and then the care of small children. I didn't like writing under such pressure, but found I could, producing a text that was somewhat experimental but still in some ways as cryptic and as safe as my earlier poems on the same topic had been. Just like my students, when it really came down to sharing important feelings in class, I wasn't comfortable risking too much.

After sharing my work in a full-class response workshop, class members in written responses told me:

- Watch out for your writer voice messing up your storyteller voice. Making your mother a literary device makes the reader, intimately involved at this point, recoil a little—then you needlessly have to win me back. You do [win me back], of course, but why mess with it?
- Are you ever afraid that you may have inherited your mother's illness?
- I think I got the gist of it, but I felt that there was something that you were holding back, that you weren't coming out and saying.
- I think writings like this are no doubt therapeutic for the writer. But possibly run the risk of being dull in general? I mean, why are you really writing this? What is your audience?

By sharing this essay, I had achieved several of my goals. I had pushed us all to explore new territory (many readers admired the experimental style of the essay and the fact that I embarked on a topic that was certainly not "purely academic"), and I had published side-by-side with my class, in the workshop book, receiving many useful writers' responses. But I also learned from their responses that I needed to go farther to meet my own definition of risk-taking (which was clarified by this experience, made real, not just a class construct). Right then, I decided that my radical revision (later in the semester) would be an expansion—a meta-commentary that explicitly answered all the explicit questions I had received.

### The Mystery Paper

It was time for the second paper.

My drafting pattern didn't change; I didn't become a better student. I even "cheated" a bit to get going, resurrecting two pages of an earlier attempt at a mystery novel. I found myself adding three pages to the front of the old draft and two pages to the end at 9:00 p.m. the night before class, a small group workshop. I drafted a lot, certainly, five pages in about an hour, but they worked like a cockeyed frame on a bad painting. I tried to fix an uneven draft and to experiment with first person and third person narration in each section. This writing was confusing and didn't work. The four undergraduate writers in my group that week were patient when they explained this to me. Two of the other writers in the group, we agreed, had produced very professional drafts for that session. It came as no surprise that I hadn't succeeded on that draft, given my one hour investment.

At 8:00 p.m. the night before the next draft due date, I smoothed the mystery into a third person narrative, using suggestions from my group, enjoying myself finally and adding three more pages to produce a rude first chapter. Most of my struggle included an academic resistance to the stylized cliche of writing genre fiction. Finally, I started enjoying the sheer dumb language play.

Full-class response comments were positive. I had readers. They liked the mystery novel and wanted to read more. I felt good. I found myself confiding the plot to interested listeners, making fun of my imagining the completed novel on the grocery check-out book rack. In one written response, a student complimented me on being "okay," not just another academic writer. He mentioned that he expected all my work (by Dr. Bishop, after all) to be something he'd never want to read. So, at least one class writer found me humanized by genre fiction. That was good.

### The Academic Essay

But I had fudged that second paper, in my own mind, by starting from the core of an old piece. I had hoped to draft this piece earlier and to make it longer, two or more chapters. What got in my way? The complacency generated during my first paper that I could "pull it off" the night before?

Today, I wonder. Wasn't I just being a college writer, after all, doing what I could to make those damn deadlines? Didn't I offer my students the option of using any paper from another class (as long as that teacher agreed) in order to make each writing task productive and real? In fact, I knew some of our papers were likely to have been submitted previously in one form or another, whether I was told or not. I knew for sure that a few had been drafted previously because certain writers had asked for a chance to rework important-to-them texts, using this class as audience. And

I knew that many professional writers really work in this way; in published interviews, they talk about the way they beg, borrow, finesse, repeat, expand, and redo, transforming borrowings and old material until it becomes something uniquely their own.

I needed to forgive myself. The deadline for the third paper was looming. The academic essay I had promised (with great enthusiasm) to write was haunting me. (In fact, it's still haunting me because, at one point in my writing cycle, I'm drafting this very essay instead of that one, which is still due.) Still, I knew I was in trouble for the third paper deadline. I was tired. Beyond this class, I was completing so many other writing and reading tasks—from composing recommendation letters for students to analyzing research data to sending E-mail messages to reading essays for a rhetoric reading group, and so on. I had my whole academic life and duties outside of class. Meet every class deadline with my class? Who was I fooling? I wanted to whine—"But I'm conducting the class too, no one else is." Outside of the classroom, for instance, I was responding to drafts from all class members and eventually I would evaluate each end-of-semester portfolio (with the help of each writer's self-evaluation).

Still, I knew I was simply losing steam. And I was going to be giving a paper out of town at a conference the week the class book was assembled. So I turned in a copy of the conference paper for the class book. Ten pages of academic prose, *but not the prose I had promised.* Of course other class writers had changed their contracts, but the cheat was a little bigger than the cheat for paper two. I had drafted a thirty page essay the summer before and trimmed it for the upcoming conference talk, so I was really only tinkering with the final editing of a previously drafted piece of writing. Nevertheless, several graduate students, who were themselves completing academic writing, talked to me later about the essay/talk, which experimented with academic form. I relearned an old writer's lesson: just because I cheated didn't mean the piece had no value; it just seemed like it because I had set high goals. I had to consciously remind myself that with this essay, published in our third and last class book, I *had* accomplished two of my original goals. I had continued to share with the class and I had exhibited the breadth of writing that I do.

As I think about the difficulty I was having keeping up with the class as the semester moved on, I understand that I could have written something new, short, and clever, but I balked at giving up my belief that every piece I wrote and submitted should both be meaningful to me professionally and be a piece I cared about since I wanted my students to do the same. I could have written another family story, but I didn't want to repeat a genre. I could have imitated another class writer's style, as many of us noticed was happening spontaneously to class writers as we moved from class book to class book. But I chose not to—something to do with my own goals and my own resistance to my own class structure: its deadlines, its orderly pacing.

For advanced writing workshop, the fourth and final assignment consisted of a radical revision that would be shared with a small group before submission in the end-of-semester class portfolio. I knew what mine would be, if and when I wrote it: my planned expansion on my family story with a meta-narrative. But, I knew I had given up. I was spoiled, stubborn, busy with three demanding out-of-class academic writing projects. I went back to my old ways and told myself I'd draft it later; I knew just when, it was listed there in my ever-updated mental writing calendar. I'd get to it—at Christmas. And Christmas was still a month away.

But what a change when I went to class the day we had small group workshop for the radical revision papers.

### Not Writing with/for Class

Throughout the fall semester, I had enjoyed coming in and joking about the difficulties I had experienced meeting my own deadlines or warned class members (and myself) that an essay was due: All this talk had a pleasing ring of solidarity for me.

The morning of the workshop for the radical revision, I came in and suggested that everyone get in groups of three but that I wouldn't this time because I didn't have a draft. My failure made me sheepish *and* belligerent but also helped me to be more forgiving of several class members who were similarly unprepared. That day, the class dragged on for me. Seated alone at a table at the front of the class, I was bored, even though I watched groups and responded to student writing. Near the end of class, I moved from group to group, checking in, encouraging, nagging a bit. What a dull day it seemed. And this surprised me particularly because a quick survey of the class showed groups of writers, deep in writing conversations.

Earlier in the semester small group workshops sped by for me. I was a full participant, expectant, trying not to dominate my group, even as I tried to continue to monitor other class groups. Most often though, I fell fully into my new group's discussions, finding myself as surprised as other class members when the class period was over and we headed out the doors before the next class poured in.

That day, during the radical revision workshop, without a draft, I was no longer a class member. I was a full-fledged teacher. And I didn't like the feeling.

### A Final Note

While drafting this essay for my final project, I feel a little better, somewhat redeemed. Thinking back, I know I learned that I could do a lot of the writing with my class and be a class member even as I orchestrated and shared in our workshops and discussions. I did find it useful to be working toward class deadlines—it led me to modify the schedule, make it do-able and productive rather than grueling (as I often can be in my enthusiasm to encourage more writing). Each semester, though, I need to examine more thoroughly my dual role of writer/teacher, asking myself who is benefiting from each role and to what degree—me or the students, deciding if my own need to make my writing count for me professionally isn't less important than maintaining an "author also" stance in the class.

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## APPENDIX

### Course Description

This workshop writing course is designed to help you develop original writing, primarily nonfiction prose. There will be frequent opportunities for drafting, revision, and editing. You will learn to analyze and enhance your own writing process and analyze and evaluate your own, your peers', and professional writing to learn more about writing conventions, revision options, stylistic alternatives, and audience expectations.

Your primary texts for this course are the papers we write and share. Midway through the semester, I will circulate several essays for each class member to copy. These essays will lead us to further discussions on style revision and writers voice(s).

In developing your semester contract, you'll aim for a balance of the following elements:

a) primarily (but not exclusively) nonfiction prose with attention to real, potential publication forums (from literary journals to local and regional newspapers);

b) practical work (a paper you need to complete for another class, for job or family reasons, etc.); this may include primary research (interviews, etc.) or secondary research (library sources);

c) experimental work (a paper that takes you into new territory, asking you to push your writing to the limit, choosing a difficult topic, writing style, audience, genre, and so on).

Your fourth paper will be a radical revision of paper one or two. In addition, we will write responses to other students' work, do in-class invention work, guided freewriting, style exercises, and so on.

I suggest you collect all your informal class writings in a class journal and keep your own notes on the progress of each paper to help you compile an accurate writing process cover sheet. You will submit your work for evaluation in a class portfolio at the end of the semester (see the portfolio discussion below).

**If you are enrolled for graduate credit you will complete a fifth paper in consultation with me. You will work on a piece of prose that will benefit you professionally and aim for a final, submission-ready version by the end of the semester. For instance, those in creative writing might submit a nonfiction essay to interested literary journals like *The Georgia Review* or *Puerto del Sol.* Those in rhetoric or education might write an essay on teaching for *Freshman English News, Exercise Exchange,* or *Arizona English Bulletin,* and those in literature might submit an essay to *College English* or a literary journal in their field of interest. You will be asked to share drafts with me and with at least one other student enrolled for graduate credit. At a minimum, we will hold two conferences for this paper.

All class members will share copies of contracted papers with class response groups to gather ideas for revision and with me during individual conferences to learn close editing techniques. Each class member will share professional drafts in a class book three times during the semester.

As a class, we will discuss these essays, focusing, again, on an analysis of writers' strategies, style, and voice(s). Overall then, you should expect to write frequently, to be willing to make and take advantage of revision suggestions, to work to develop your own varied and personally valuable writing, and to attend and participate fully in the writers' workshop classroom.

Finally, I expect to support your writing as fully as I can and to write and share my writing with you.

### Evaluation Policy

Class Attendance and Participation: 30 percent (including participation in group work and completion of drafts, exercises, readings, style presentations, and so on).

Final Writing Portfolios: 70 percent (20 percent assigned for the quality of your personal contract to allow you to experiment, take risks with and extend your writing and how you proceeded; I will make this evaluation based on my knowledge of you as a writer, developed over the course of the semester. 50 percent assigned for the quality of final drafts and process cover sheets. In addition, I usually ask for a substantial letter of self-evaluation to be included with the final portfolio, discussing your development over the course of the entire semester).

## A TALE OF TWO WRITING TEACHERS
## Tale Two: Teacher Writing with a First-Year Writing Class

by Sandra Gail Teichmann
Florida State University

First composition class I had ever taught. I was as new to the classroom as my students were, so new that Toyin (a student) complained, "If we were to start over from day one, I wish you would not have told the class this was your first class . . . it was a nice gesture to be honest and open with us, but the atmosphere set from that day on was not conducive to our learning."

I think what Toyin expected from a college teacher was someone with authority, a teacher who would tell her exactly what to do, based on years of experience. Unlike the other nineteen students in the class, Toyin did not think she got much help for her writing in our workshop classroom where I was just another writer/responder, responding to student work and working on my own work. Perhaps Toyin was disappointed that I didn't have all the answers. If a teacher is a working writer with her class, she knows she does not have, never will have, all the answers.

I want now to look at how we worked through the semester of process writing without all the answers and think about the experience of writing with my class while taking Wendy Bishop's Advanced Article and Essay class, where she was also a teacher-writer.

### My Dad and Toothpicks

In the first-year class, we started off: Essay #1—conduct an interview; write a profile. The number of students in the class was even, so I was left without a partner for interviewing (not good; at my desk alone, I was different, conspicuous, separate, not what I had intended). I decided to write about someone I knew—my dad—write about his preparing to die. I got involved in the memories, but just to let my students know that I still existed as they went about their interviewing, I wrote a note on their third class handout that it was my daddy's birthday. I got no response from them, and when I told my dad on the phone, he laughed and said I probably had them wondering about my sanity.

I went right on working on my invention exercises and journal entries and lists, building my essay as they were building theirs. Then I assigned a journal entry to do a clustering and a vignette from the word "toothpicks." This broke the ice, humanized me, as Wendy, my graduate professor, would say. The students and I started sharing our writing. They showed me and each other what they had surprised themselves with, and they wanted to see what I had written about toothpicks. We were on our way. We wrote, and then we responded to each other's essays, and we made revisions and more revisions. For me, the responses and revision suggestions from this first-year class were as interesting and helpful as any response I received from the advanced workshop I was taking with Wendy, and I told the first-year class that their reactions were sharp and thoughtful. The students knew I was sharing my essays with the advanced workshop and wanted to help me make my writing the best that it could be just as I wanted to help each of them write an excellent essay.

After writing a third draft of this exploratory profile, I spent about ten minutes talking about the process I was going through writing "Grandma's Umbrella" (Teichmann 1992). I told my students that I thought there was evidence of a thinking process toward discovery in the essay, and they said, "yes, we understand; the idea is neat." I was modeling; I told them that this essay was an example of how they too could work through the process of writing.

**Guest Teachers**

Not only did this class have me as a teacher-writer in their classroom, but I invited guest teachers, whom I encouraged to bring in-process work of their own, to participate in group workshops. Of the seven guest teachers, only three (one of them, Wendy) chose to participate as a teacher-writer. I think the students found it easier to accept the newcomer who was risking exposure through his or her own writing than a newcomer who would only make comments about student work. Response was mixed to the first guest teacher, Amy, who didn't bring a piece of her own writing. Jamie wrote, "Amy was really helpful and I really learned a lot from her . . . making up for the lack of response from others." However Patty wrote, "She insinuated that I wasn't a good writer. She may be right, but she didn't have to be so rude about it . . . the lady really made me just not even want to write . . . anymore."

Response was more consistent to another guest teacher, Fred, who did bring a piece of his own writing. Jason wrote, "What made it so good was Fred. He was very insightful and truthful with his critiques. One thing that impressed me was his writing style. I was amazed at how vividly he portrayed the security guard." Anne Marie wrote, "I honestly enjoyed the workshop . . . even though I get nervous . . . Fred was really cool and knew what he was talking about."

As our invited guests brought their own writing into workshop and as I worked on my essays, the students accepted the idea of teacher as writer with seeming indifference. I didn't feel conspicuous, didn't feel as if I were showing off as I wrote in my journal when they did or when I brought a draft in for workshop. This is contrary to Jim Corder's experience: "I started writing my own essay assignments . . . once in a while an essay worked out pretty well, and I knew that I was showing off when I turned such an essay in for my students to read. I have told myself that it's all right—early rhetors were expected periodically to make public speeches, testifying that they knew how to do what they taught" (1989, 94).

Because self-confidence is so important for exploratory writing, my intent was to propose no heroes in first-year writing: no published author held in awe over a student-author, no student-author held in awe over another student-author, and no teacher-author held in awe over any student-author. All who brought drafts of essays did so for help in getting to the next draft, not for displaying accomplished work. Neither I nor the invited guests brought essays just "for [the] students to read" (Corder 1989, 94). My reason for wanting to be a teacher-writer was to act as role model, but more importantly to gain entry into what could have been a closed circle of students. Through my second essay, I think I was accepted further as I wrote about me-as-I-see-myself through the subject of manners. I took a big risk; I exposed quite a lot of myself through the essay, not only to the students, but to myself.

This essay was in the form of fragments. Like Wendy in her second paper, I was feeling pressured, so I too cheated a bit. I stuck together several journal entries based on memory, focused on manners, focused on myself, one on top of another. I read through for a thread. Good enough, I thought. The students said things like "so weird, so complex that it's really interesting; stream that goes out and then comes back; a very strong, say-what-you-mean kind of piece." One student said the essay in its "light-switch format" gave her an example of risk and thought, except there was no big discovery yet. So I had to write a radical revision over the weekend. Somehow I got to a discovery through lots of journal writing, and I also came to an awareness that this Essay #2 was a perfect example of how the required five-weekly journal entries could build and feed into the assigned essays—stacking journal entry upon journal entry, pulling it all together with a thread of meaning.

**Self in Grammar B**

The third essay for the semester was to be a look at self in a social context. Well, why not that big nagging concern of mine: overpopulation? But how could I approach the subject from an interesting new direction and write about the problem without being judgmental? In my journal I wrote: "An idea—make my overpopulation/self essay a five-paragraph essay. I've never written one of those before." Somewhere in here I got the idea to write the essay by comparing production of people to production of the five-paragraph essay (hopefully disappearing as a way of generating high school themes). I wanted to know what writing this type of essay could be like.

For me, this was the most difficult of the semester. It wasn't the comparison that was difficult; it was writing the five-paragraph essay. In and outside of class, I struggled with it, discussed it, wrote outlines, wrote it, threw five paragraphs away, ranted "I'm not a writer," sought pity, was incapable of the simplest of writing tasks, wrote more outlines, worried that I really couldn't write, thought more about the ideas, wrote it out again, and through it all, my students treated me as they treated each other: sometimes consoling me, sometimes becoming outright bored with me, sometimes ignoring my problems when their own outweighed mine.

When I presented five paragraphs for workshop, Erika immediately said I should have had the three points supporting my thesis in the thesis statement in the first paragraph. Okay. She also said I had made no value judgement, had come to no conclusions. Leslie confirmed that by saying she was baffled, and Jason said he had no idea why I wrote the piece. So, I decided to abandon the perfect five-paragraph essay and put some of my thought process into the essay. I wrote out crot after crot (Winston Weathers's (1984) word for fragments of prose) to go along with my imperfect five paragraphs.

My "Essay" was my second use of a fragmentary form in this class. Maybe I was using this form unconsciously to model my writer's mind at work in the process of exploration, or maybe this was an easy, natural way for me to write, or maybe it was both. My fragments didn't find a lot of acceptance at first. Some students, after reading a draft of "Essay," came to me and said "What does this mean? I'm totally confused. You scare me. Do I have to write like that?" At any rate, this other-than-conventional writing was an experience for my class; many of the students had come from high school English classes where the only acceptable kind of essay writing was the five-paragraph essay.

Erika and David were two of the strongest believers in the five-paragraph essay. After reading Weathers's (1984) article in Wendy's class, I ran off copies for my first-year class. David reacted in his journal, "I was very shocked . . . this Grammar B promotes . . . just plain unorganized illogical writing. It goes against everything I have been taught . . . was the correct and most understandable style of writing. It seems like the work of some student who is failing an English class or something."

Later for their fourth essays, both Erika and David wrote exploratory pieces in Grammar B: Erika because she wanted to take different points of view and express different emotions; David because I asked him to write his fourth essay in fragments, labyrinthine sentences, repetitions, collage/montage, lists, and double voice. After just one bit of resistance in his journal, "I am absolutely against the assignment you gave me," David proceeded to explore his extremely shy self from several angles. At the end of the semester, he was pleased with the possibilities of a new kind of writing and with his exploration of self.

### Writing Outfitter

By the first of December, I'd written another draft for the fourth essay assignment. The subject of this one, assigned by one of my students, was "What do I feel I'm trying to teach my class, and do I feel they are learning?" I accepted because I too thought a review of the fifteen weeks might be in order. I wrote an essay evaluating our success at reaching the goal in terms of each person in the class finding writing to be a pleasure and a means of thinking.

In the "Writing Outfitter" (Teichmann 1993), I portrayed myself as an outfitter, hired by the students to aid them in reaching their individual writing goals. Toyin's response to my third draft was, "It's a successful writing piece, full of thought. As far as discovery and risk go, however, I don't think I see that." She was right; I hadn't yet made a discovery, and any risk that I took was minimal, other than mirroring the semester of work and writing the piece as an extended metaphor. She was pushing me just as I had pushed her all semester. Fair enough.

I also had comments from Wendy, my teacher, concerning this essay: "I'm tired of sports metaphors for writing, so you're encountering my experiential foible . . . firing away seems to lose some of [the] sense of process writing to me—firing means hitting *or* missing whereas the writings I see in my [students'] final portfolios aren't so binary—they're seeds, shoots, fully blooming plants and flowers, withered unnurtured dry stalks."

Well, yes. The fourth essay, a walk down the trail—not a bear rug—when Wendy and Toyin saw it, continues to evolve just as teaching/writing continues to be a new experience with each new semester, each new student.

### A Comment on the First Tale

Reading Wendy's "Tale One," I wonder why Wendy, after all her experience, isn't able to approach each essay she writes with her class with as much vulnerability as she would like. Recently she suggested to me that perhaps it is enthusiasm, commitment, and interest that make for a good teacher. I don't disagree with the value of these qualities, but I think a teacher's experience can be that of ongoing innocence if he or she incorporates curiosity, risk, and respect into each semester of teaching and writing.

Wendy may not have thought of herself as vulnerable as she shared her writing with the class, but as a student in that class, I felt she was as vulnerable as any of the students, and I treated her accordingly. I was curious about her and her ideas, and I hoped that she was as interested in me. By writing with the class and sharing drafts of essays, she had as much opportunity to risk exposure of self through her ideas as I did as a student in her class. She also had an opportunity to respect each student's individuality and ideas as each student had opportunity to respect her.

Perhaps if I had not been writing with my class, I would have felt separate from the students, above them, in control of them. I might then have acted more like the teacher Toyin desired, and I might have felt like Wendy the day she came unprepared for workshop: "I was bored, . . . I moved . . . from group to group, checking in, encouraging, nagging a bit. What a dull day it seemed."

Sitting in one of the groups Wendy "checked in" with on that day, I sensed her boredom. Wendy had teacher power that day and lacked innocence. She made me uncomfortable as she sat at her desk while we were engaged in small group discussions. Maybe I felt a little sorry for her, knowing her commitment to writing and knowing how she likes being involved in the dynamics of a writing community, but on the other hand, I was hesitant to ask her to join our group, an active, enthusiastic group of four graduate students, because she would not have been joining the group as an equal but as a teacher, maybe even as a judge. Because she had no work of her own to share, with which to make herself vulnerable, she was excluded from the groups, excluded from the class that one day.

Fortunately, all days weren't like that day, and I left Wendy's class with confidence and courage for writing, and I think my students left my class likewise, with confidence and courage, liking to write.

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## REACHING PARENTS THROUGH LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

by Carol Jago

Santa Monica High School, California

Transforming the schools without reeducating the community is dangerous. Parents, citizens, school board members, and taxpayers need to understand the reasons behind reforms or else they will choose the status quo every time for their children. The community needs to be reminded by teachers of the important role the community must play in the children's educations. I was perplexed by the problem of how to reach them until I began writing for my local newspaper.

Most newspapers print articles by syndicated columnists who typically offer generic advice without reference to local issues or conditions. We can do better. Most newspapers are eager for local teachers to contribute to their education pages. I began by simply sending an essay to the editor, and now I contribute fortnightly. The response from parents, students, board members, and the community at large to these columns has been extensive. Again and again they tell me how interested they are to read about new ways of thinking about education. As teachers we talk exhaustively about these issues with one another. It's time we went public.

What follows is a sample column of mine. Feel free to use this as a model or contact me about ways to get started.

### Warning: Nintendo Hazardous to Young Boys' Reading

Take a moment to feel the inside edge of your middle finger. There's probably an old callous from years of gripping a pencil. Now grab the hand of your 10-year-old son (lacking a son, you could try any male under the age of 15) and check the location of his callouses. Chances are you'll find them on his thumbs where he holds the Nintendo controls.

Ask the boy about what he does after school, on weekends, for fun. His answers may frighten you. Young boys spend hours of every day immersed in an electronic world. It may well be that they are quiet and not breaking things around the house. It may even be that Nintendo is preferable to watching most television shows. But the question any thinking adult must ask is how such "play" influences the child.

Do the hours of bonging an opponent in Street Fighter promote violent attitudes in the real world? The fighting in the game is not set in any story. There seems to be no purpose other than caveman-like brawling.

Yet boys are transfixed by the complex combinations of punches and kicks, the subtle maneuvering of buttons to "kill" their opponent. They talk about the characters from the game as though they were real people. They identify with certain figures. They dream about the fights. Like a drug, Nintendo is a quick fix, leaving the player only with the desire for more: new games, bigger screens, better graphics.

I believe a generation of youngsters is dangerously addicted to electronic games. I fear that with such flashy, programmed entertainment at their fingertips, they will never be drawn by the monotony of every day to the books that can actually teach them something about heroes and underdogs. Wouldn't boys' time be better spent reading these books than shooting with Nintendo?

Imagine a mouse being born into your family—a clever, good-looking mouse you loved. Imagine that this mouse was your substitute teacher for a day. E. B. White's classic, *Stuart Little*, is a delightful model of an imaginary world without a moment of violence.

Imagine you've moved to a new house with an attic bedroom where strange things keep happening. Avi's *Something's Upstairs* explores fear and bravery without resort to guns.

Children are unlikely to read for pleasure if they've tasted only electronic delights. Seduced by sexy wrappings at the video store, they find the library's vast catalog dull. In fact, there is no comparison.

Educated parents worry that the next generation will not be able to match the economic status they have achieved. What about their intellectual stature? The habits of reading and writing are set in childhood. Without steady practice, our children will not be able to negotiate their professors' reading lists at UCLA and Harvard. Without those callouses, they will never pass the bar. Aptitude and native wit cannot make up for the lost hours spent before this insidious machine. Please pull the plug.

Try reading with your children instead, the way you did when they were small. My 10-year-old begs for me to do this even though he is a very able reader. There's something special about the quiet time together. Of course he wishes I would buy him Nintendo, but it's up to me to stand firm.

## STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, TWICE

by Jan Morgenstern
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Peter had always been a hard worker. He had farmed as long as he could remember. As an adult, he not only continued farming, but also began driving 18-wheeler trucks to support his family. At the age of 55, however, he decided that he should no longer drive. He felt that for his safety and for the safety of everyone else on the roads, he had better park his truck, for a while anyway. The reason was that he could not read, and the road signs were becoming more numerous and more wordy. He could no longer depend just on numbers; the words were catching up to him.

His daughter had achieved her GED diploma through our program at Mercer County Vo-Tech School and brought Peter to her graduation. Something touched him, and two weeks later, he came in inquiring about the adult literacy program. He was sure he could never learn to read, but liked the school. We sat and talked, and Peter told his story.

He loved school as a child, and recalled doing well. But in third grade, he was struck by lightning during a sudden spring storm, and things were never quite the same. He remembered very little of the months that followed, but he clearly remembered that when his brothers and sisters returned to school in the fall, he was not allowed to go with them. He was heartbroken and was told that he "could no longer do school work." For some reason, the doctors and the teachers felt that after sustaining such an injury, Peter would just be taking up space in school. They felt sure that it would be better for him to stay home and work on the farm. Doing what they thought was best for their son, Peter's parents kept him home, and he worked the farm for years and years. The eight-year-old child was never again offered the chance to read or write, and thoroughly convinced by the authority figures in his life that he could not do either successfully, he did not try on his own.

Now, forty-six years later, he was trusting his story to a reading teacher. He would not fill out any school registration forms and would not consent to a test of any kind for weeks. He was certain he would fail miserably at any attempt. He came to class three times a week, and during his class time, we read—anything Peter wanted to read. He had always regretted that he was unable to read to his children, and confided to me that his real goal was to be able to read to his grandchildren. Suddenly, reading road signs became secondary. So we read children's books, and Peter was delighted. He laughed and reacted just as my children had when I read these books to them. I read and Peter listened. After twelve hours of class time, Peter asked if he could try to read *Green Eggs and Ham*. He read it perfectly, and his confidence soared. We continued to read. We went to the library, and Peter chose books to read together. Now we started talking about reading strategies, word families, and phonics. He was reading. He read to his grandchildren over the phone long distance to Texas. He read road signs and began driving again. He finally believed that he could "do school work," and learned at an incredible rate. He read the newspaper, subscribed to magazines, and joined the library. After forty-five hours of instruction, Peter was reading at about a tenth-grade level. He had become a reader in just a few months and could read just about anything he wanted, but his favorite book was still *Green Eggs and Ham*.

Peter and his wife moved to Texas the next year to join their son and the grandchildren he read to so proudly. Several years later, I met the daughter who introduced Peter to me years before. She told me that her father suffered several heart attacks and spent his last year before he died virtually bedridden. Peter told his family that he really didn't mind because it gave him a good excuse to read.

Millions of adults remain illiterate—some of whom, like Peter, have taken the courageous step back to school to learn to read, only to meet with failure again. For a number of years I have worked with illiterate adults and, sad to say, I have seen the same methods of instruction and the same philosophies of education that failed these adults as children continue to be used in adult literacy classes where, for that very reason, they may fail again. My desire is to help avoid this repetition of failure in adult classrooms by offering an alternate and, I believe, better way of teaching reading to adult learners.

### Characteristics of the Adult Learner

Adult learners are, above all, adults. They have experienced life with all of its frustration, success, tragedy, joy, love, hate, embarrassment, pride, boredom, and humor. When adults return to school, they bring with them lifetimes of experience and understanding unique to each of them as individuals.

Adults expect and deserve to be treated as adults, even though they may display the academic achievement of children. They enter classes feeling a great deal of apprehension about the teacher, the other students, and their decision to return to school. They return to school after being out for any number of years, wondering if there is anything they might remember, convinced that they have forgotten everything.

Adult students seem to have their own variety of problems that may become barriers to learning. They may have financial worries, job-related stress, family tensions, unreliable transportation, inadequate child care, and health problems. Sometimes these barriers may be combined with the same barriers to learning that affected them as children. Adult students may also have an orientation to failure. Our society has set the age of eighteen as the chronologically correct age to graduate, and lacking this accomplishment, they have already failed in the eyes of many. Low self-esteem destroys self-confidence. Talented people in a variety of nonacademic areas return to school convinced they cannot learn, and this educational failure may spread to other areas of their life.

Adult students seem to be very easily frustrated. They soon realize that they have so much to make up, and they want to do it very quickly. Many are not used to sitting in one place for any length of time. Just being in a classroom again is a frustrating event. Some are used to being authority figures, and it is difficult to no longer have that role. Many have been socially deprived, and it takes a while for them to feel comfortable among people. Many carry with them unpleasant memories of school and become very frustrated when this new school situation resembles the old.

Most adult students return to school because they want to be there. They want to be able to use the education they receive—to be better parents or employees, to improve the quality of their lives (if only to give them a feeling of success), to meet other adults, to become part of a group, to satisfy a requirement of the courts or agencies providing government funds, or to help improve their job prospects. Their reasons for returning to school are as varied as their reasons for leaving school. What is important is that they are in school for a reason, which makes them motivated to learn.

Most instructors' manuals for teachers of adult basic education stress one important idea. Adults learn best when the learning environment meets their needs and the atmosphere is one of mutual respect and concern (Rance-Roney and Ditmars 1990). Kenneth Goodman (1986) describes holistic instruction, or what is commonly referred to as whole language, as showing continuous respect for language, for learners, and for teachers. He explains that holistic instruction begins with everyday, useful, relevant, functional language, and moves through a full range of written language including literature in all its variety. If learners acquire language naturally through exposure, demonstration, engagement, practice, and reinforcement from the people around them, it follows that adults learning to read can benefit from a whole language philosophy of the reading process and can learn to read in the same ways that children do. The whole language approach stresses respect for the learner, the teacher, and the language. For adults coming back to school, this respect can mean the difference between students continuing their studies or not. Students are accepted for what they are, and their instruction begins wherever they need it to begin. Students need to feel comfortable and accepted, but more importantly, students need to take part in constructing their future by providing the teacher with their interests and academic needs. Interviews and conferences become a vital part of the registration process, the teaching process, and the assessment process.

### Steven's Story

Frank Smith (1988) said, "The more we read, the more we are able to read." If reading becomes relevant, useful, and personal, a need to read is created, forcing the process to develop. I remember a student, Steven, a young African American man from a southern inner city home who had been displaced to an institution in a predominantly white affluent community. He was expected to read eleventh-grade material in the subjects of chemistry, literature, and history. He was referred to me after he requested more help with his reading. He wanted to learn to read, and I was pleased to be able to help him. Because of school policy, a formal assessment was taken that showed his comprehension to be at the second-grade level. This was, of course, reading test material. During interview sessions, it was discovered that he had a deep interest in the history of African Americans, especially Martin Luther King, Jr. A carefully chosen biography of Dr. King became the basis of reading lessons. Biographies of Frederick Douglass, Jackie Robinson, and other African Americans were soon part of our private library. Steven read successfully and joyfully. In time, this reading skill carried over to the chemistry, literature, and history classes. He began to look for things to read, and in six months his grades went from D's to B's. He made oral reports and began to volunteer to read aloud in class. On a posttest similar to the pretest he took six months earlier, he comprehended on the ninth-grade level. I believe that Steven succeeded because he had reason to read, he chose the material he wanted to read, and he was expected to succeed.

In a survey conducted of 100 students in my classes, eighty-five of these students defined reading as pronouncing or saying words and sentences correctly. Only fifteen people mentioned meaning as being an essential part of reading. To help adults learn to read better, this perception of reading must be changed. Many adults have been saturated with phonics drills to the point of sounding out word after word with little attention paid to the meaning of the sentence. Discussion, practice, and personal involvement with reading and writing can help develop this perception. Once students understand that they are reading for meaning, they will be better able to predict what is coming. This will give students a purpose and a reason to read, and a cycle will begin, one we want to see in all our students.

### Conclusion

Francis Kazemek's metaphor of adult literacy education as storytelling seems to parallel a whole language approach in adult education (Piatt 1993). The applications that he suggests using are as follows:

1. Sustained Silent Reading and Writing: Kazemek states that adults who are becoming readers need to engage in reading

on a regular and daily basis. He believes that these self-selected materials should be read at the beginning of each class. Similarly, sustained writing in a journal about any topic important to the student should be done a few minutes each day. This will help adults experience how they can use writing to organize and express ideas.

2. Prepared Oral Reading as a Social Activity: Kazemek believes that oral reading allows adults to experience the rhyme and rhythm of written language. Rehearsing readings with a partner or with a small group provides the individual with support and peer model.
3. Language Experience Texts: Kazemek describes group-composed and dictated texts as invaluable for developing meaningful reading materials, discussions about reading and writing, explorations of society and the world, and group cohesiveness.
4. Reading, Rereading, and Retelling Published Texts: Kazemek notes that research has shown that the more we retell what we have read the better we understand it. Students' own writings need to be complemented with a wide and rich assortment of other materials.
5. Strategy Instruction: Kazemek directs the teacher to develop appropriate strategy lessons, similar to "mini-lessons," dealing with specific aspects of the reading processes based upon the students' reading and writing needs.
6. Informal Assessment: Kazemek follows the whole language approach into holistic assessment—informal and ongoing with both the student and the teacher involved. This allows growth to be documented and future instruction to be planned.

Whole language practiced in the adult classroom includes giving the student easy and constant access to books in the classroom and at home; using scheduled class time to allow for uninterrupted sustained silent reading of student-selected material; reading aloud regularly; sharing information about reading in "book talks" and in writing; helping students to "read like writers"; and, activities that focus on literature and ask students to respond to literature.

The increasing number of illiterate adults has forced educators to reevaluate traditional approaches for nontraditional learners. Teachers of reading, whether they teach to children or to adults, need to offer their students ways to be successful—successful in being able to read and in enjoying that ability. Adult literacy teachers need to have a working knowledge of many techniques and a variety of methods, and an understanding of how a student learns to read. Teachers must see their students as unique individuals who can best be served in a literacy program adapted to their goals and needs. When students set their own agendas for learning, both academic and personal growth develops. Whole language is a philosophy of teaching and learning that is applicable for *all* learners, regardless of age.

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## JOURNAL WRITING AND ACTIVE LEARNING IN COLLEGE ART CLASSES

by William Murdick (with Richard Grinstead,
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At our university we have been exploring ways in which active learning strategies can be added across the curriculum. Our guiding principle holds that students can learn through indirect as well as direct instruction, and they can learn how to learn while absorbing conceptual and content knowledge. Active learning includes activities such as learning to draw or attending an art show as a means of learning about art. Teachers also learn how to teach better: they pick up new information and insights from their students' reports on their personal acquisition of knowledge and they learn about their students' learning by monitoring their active learning activities.

What follows is the story of how four art teachers and I (an English teacher) introduced active learning components into drawing and art history classes, and how the art teachers recorded and interpreted their findings.

### The First Study: Journals for Self-Evaluation

Our first attempt to add active learning to an art class took place in an Introduction to Drawing class taught by Richard Grinstead. Active learning is already built into such a course, since students are often left alone to pursue their own projects. Nevertheless, we felt that if students could be taught to analyze and evaluate their own work and their own growth as artists, instead of relying solely on the teacher's evaluation, their artistic skills would be enhanced.

That first semester we had students write briefly in journals every day at the end of the class, just before leaving the studio. At the beginning of the course, the students were given several prompts and told that they could write on any one (or more) of them, or on any subject that struck their fancy:

- What did you learn today and how did you learn it?
- What kinds of problems are you having?
- Describe your successes.
- What have you seen other students or professional artists do that interests you?
- How are your attitudes toward art, or yourself as an artist, changing?

It was hoped that these prompts would get students to think deeply about what they were doing as they learned how to draw. In addition, through the journals we could monitor their learning—or, in some cases, their failure to learn.

As part of our own journal writing, I kept a record of Grinstead's observations, articulated through his discussions with me. Here are several excerpts from my notebook:

> This drawing class seems to be doing better than the typical class, partly, Grinstead believes, because of the writing. The students are thinking more about their art. The key to learning, Grinstead says, is "to see your mistakes." The articulation of their drawing problems in the journals causes the students to look harder and retain the insight. Otherwise they would "just—go away and come back" or "blow it off

> and go home," meaning that when examining their product at the end of the day, they would experience a moment's frustration, and then forget about it. The journal writing student, by contrast, intellectualizes her problem and works it out, and monitors her learning instead of the teacher having to do it for her. The self-evaluation increases learning.

In other notebook entries, I noted these observations by Grinstead:

> This class is more engaged in the course than previous classes. The students, for example, do more drawing on their own. They talk about their extracurricular drawing in their journals.
>
> These students ask in the privacy of their journals what they think of as "stupid" questions; this helps the teacher know what concepts to repeat or clarify in class.
>
> "In the journals you can see the changes in attitude toward art, from scared to confident."

I wanted to confirm Grinstead's impressions about the success of the journals by asking his students what they thought. So for their last journal entries, we asked the class to respond to new prompts in order to get an evaluation of the course, prompts such as: "What did you think of the journal writing?" Only about half of the students responded to this particular prompt (it was the end of the last class, and many students were anxious to leave campus) and, to be quite honest, two of those who did respond didn't like the journal writing; nevertheless, the positive responses show a belief on the part of many students that the practice of journal writing contributed to their learning:

> I thought [keeping journals] was an excellent idea. After each day drawing, it got you to think back and look for things to improve. I did find, however, that toward the end of the course that each entry was harder to write, they sometimes sounded like the day before.
>
> I also feel that writing in the journals helps because it makes you reflect on what you learned. Although what you may see or observe may sometimes be difficult to put in words, writing about it may help keep that idea in your mind.
>
> I thought this journal idea was a good move. You get to express yourself when otherwise you wouldn't say anything.

That last entry seems to touch on the need students feel for getting actively involved in their education and the role journal writing can play in that.

### Getting Out of the Classroom to Look at the Real Thing

A year after his first use of journals in his drawing class, Grinstead asked students in his Introduction to Drawing class and Art for Elementary class to keep journals, making daily entries during the last ten minutes of class. At this time the Art Department happened to be putting on a combined art show consisting of recent work from alumni and selections from the University's permanent collection. This seemed like a good opportunity to find out if students' attitudes towards art would change if they were to put aside their textbooks and classwork and walk over to the gallery to see the "real thing." Among other things, we found that most 18- to 20-year-old students had never been to an art gallery before, and most had never seen serious, professional art up close (not counting in books or on television). This outing led to journal entries expressing strong enthusiasms. We found that drawing students were anxious to see how experienced professionals solved the same technical problems that they were struggling with:

> Today I found that some art work may look easy to do, but the hand is quicker than the eye. The art work I found most interesting was the "Young Picasso." Just from looking up close, most of the facial features were shades. Actually, no line drawings. You could actually see a little of the cross hatching in the cheek area.

### Journals for Monitoring: Adding Teacher Learning to Student Learning

Later we introduced journal writing to another introductory drawing class, one taught by Ray Dunlevy. Again, we found positive results: students in a class that did journal writing seemed to improve their drawing skills more than students in a similar class who did no journal writing. However, at this point, Dunlevy and I were interested in another aspect, the use of journals to monitor learning, how journals could help the teacher learn while coaching the students. Because Dunlevy was leery of adding journal response to his duties, we decided that he would make three kinds of minimal responses to journal entries:

- a few words or phrases,
- the underlining of parts of the student's text that described problems the teacher wanted the student to remain aware of, and/or
- a check mark on entries that were not developed enough to contain interesting statements. The check mark would acknowledge that the student had done something, but would serve as a cue that he or she should make a greater effort.

In my interview with Dunlevy, he reported that the journals did not represent significantly more work because the students wrote short entries and he found it easy to respond using the method we had worked out.

Dunlevy was surprised at the insights he gained from the journals because he had thought that his one-to-one teaching methods had provided him with close communion with his students. Though he occasionally lectures and demonstrates techniques, most of the class time is used for student work. During class while students are drawing, he writes notes criticizing and praising their work; he also stops and comments orally on what they are doing; and he formally critiques a number of drawings from each student each week. He sees this one-to-one approach as constituting highly individualized instruction. However, he stated in the interview that the journals revealed information he hadn't obtained from his classroom contact.

Most impressive to him was the degree to which the journals revealed "the struggle" his students were going through in trying to understand and apply concepts, such as principles of composition and perspective, or technical innovations such as creating tones and drawing without lines. Here are two examples of entries that drew Dunlevy's attention to achievement or improvement, forcing him to re-see what the student had accomplished:

> I realized using my charcoal pencil helped me make my cast shadow darker and that made it easier to shade the other area in different tones.
>
> Blending was a lot easier today. I've heard it has to do with the oil in your skin. Perhaps, but it definitely worked better today.

This discussion of their struggles, Professor Dunlevy said, revealed important information, enabling him to respond individually to students whose writing indicated a misunderstanding of his lecture or demonstration. Students were encouraged to write about their successes as well as their failures, and the journals pointed out "leaps of achievement" in their drawings that he hadn't noticed in his rather quick in-class observations of their work.

At the beginning of the semester, students tended to list the points made in the teacher's lectures and demonstrations, and to express their insecurities and apprehension in response to their first attempts at drawing. We don't have any evidence that listing the lecture points is valuable, but we suspect it is. Here is a typical example of reiteration from a student journal:

> I also learned about value, the value scale, and how it gradually goes from dark to light colors. I learned in the lecture today about highlights and how the shape and color vary according to the object and the light source. These are all of importance when drawing a picture so that you get range in tone, color, and shape.

Drawing apprehension is a normal feeling for beginning drawing students. Students in Dunlevy's course are encouraged to look at other students' work, and often a student gets the feeling that everyone in the room is drawing better. The journals reveal the falling away of apprehension and the growth of confidence as students acquire the basics and discover that they can learn. Sometimes it happens "overnight." A series of entries shows a developing change in attitude:

> (Sept. 4) I am a little ashamed of my drawing after seeing the other students'.
>
> (Sept. 13) What interests me is how fast some of the students work but they have very good drawings. I hope to be able to sit down and picture in my mind what my picture should look like and draw it that way.
>
> (Sept. 25) I think my attitude toward my work is improving. I feel confident that I will be able to keep up with the rest of the class.

Learning can be monitored at the class level as well. The teacher, becoming aware of problems shared by many students, can clarify points to the whole class or expand on the original lecture/demonstration. Our study assumed that having students consciously focus on technical and theoretical problems, through their writing, would result in more learning. Most students managed to identify their problems in the journals. Through his comments, Dunlevy was able to encourage students to get beyond vague misgivings about their work and to get specific in their critical analysis of what went wrong. Almost all students were able to eventually do this.

The first two excerpts below are from a student who is not expansive in his entries, despite the teacher's attempts to get him to say more. However, he does pinpoint his problems:

> (Sept. 25) I know for sure now that if I had to make a living from my artwork, in this particular part of drawing, I would starve to death. I am still trying to do my best, but it doesn't seem to be coming to me. I am having trouble blending light and dark areas together.
>
> (Sept. 26) I had a good day today. I think I improved my artwork, in the shadow and light areas. I thought it looked good.

His September 25th entry begins by expressing a vague dissatisfaction with the drawing project. This is a feeling that many students have, according to Grinstead. They shrug off their dissatisfaction, walk away, and quit for the day. But this student, because he must write a journal entry, finally gets down to figuring out what "it" means when he writes, "it doesn't seem to be coming to me," and names his trouble as difficulty blending light and dark. Grinstead believes that the ability "to see one's mistakes" is crucial to learning. This student's next entry mentions his success with "blending light and dark," a success that may have occurred partly because he had clarified his difficulty in his journal, identifying it as a problem of blending.

Students' accurate and specific self-criticism gives a sense of how crucial this aspect of the journal writing is. For example, one student addresses a common problem—drawing what one knows about the shape of a familiar object instead of what one actually sees—but he goes to the length of perceiving when this problem comes into play and when it doesn't:

> Picturing things in my mind is easy. Putting those thoughts on paper is easy. The problem I have is picturing in my mind exactly what I see. If I can get in my mind exactly what I see I'll be able to get it on paper. When all I have is a mental picture to work from I seem to get it right. When I have to take an actual object and render it on paper I have problems.

There's a difference between having problems of understanding or execution and making mistakes that, in the future, can simply be avoided—provided the student becomes conscious of them. Here are some examples of students noting their mistakes, with comments (underlinings indicate what exactly Dunlevy is responding to in the text):

> When I drew my still life the first mistake I made was the background. I shaded way too dark. The second mistake was my shadow ran off the page. Other than that, my drawing came out pretty well.
>
> Today working on pastel paper with charcoal and white chalk, I think I used a little too much chalk. I should have used it to highlight and not as my light shade. I'll try this next time. [Dunlevy's comment: Good.]

While monitoring the students' analyses of their problems, the teacher can choose to intervene and give individual, direct instruction through a journal response. Dunlevy sometimes did that:

> I really like handling the charcoal. It seems to give the overall work a soft, fuzzy look. Is there something I can do to maybe be a little more defined? [Dunlevy's comment: Use sandpaper to sharpen the edges of the charcoal, this will give you crisp edges.]

Sometimes Dunlevy used his responses to keep students on track:

> I enjoyed today's exercise. Although it was sometimes difficult to get proportions correct. I'd like to do more of this—I assume we will next week. It would be interesting to do with a strong light source and use charcoal and chalk. [Dunlevy's comment: Yes, but now I want you to be linear, see relationships among edges and parts.]

Often the focus on learning took a positive form. Students sometimes noted their successes, as they had been encouraged to do by the prompts. This clearly helps improve attitude, and it may also help students delineate between what they have control over and what they still need to work on. Entries such as the following show a student articulating understanding:

> In today's objective, we are dealing with a still life drawing in charcoal. It took some time to figure out where the cast shadows fall on other objects around the object being drawn. I like the concept of laying a tone down on the whole page and then creating value changes.

One way to encourage active learning is to make it collaborative. Instead of having students sitting quietly in isolation from one another, get them talking to each other or looking at each other's work. One of the journal prompts encouraged students to observe and comment on the work of their fellow students, under the assumption that they would learn from one another. At first, these observations led students to feel insecure; everyone else's work seemed better. But with the growth of confidence after the first week or two, the methods and accomplishments of the better artists became goals, and such observations became more productive. Here are examples of two students considering their own "drawing process" as they reflect on the work of others:

> I have seen some of the other students' drawings and some of them are unique. A few have very well blended tones. Some are extremely neat while others are sloppy. Everyone has a different way of seeing things; therefore we create different images and tones. Some of the other students can create a picture real fast; while it takes others more time to put an image onto the paper. This is interesting to me because I like to take my time when I draw, but sometimes it takes me too long to create a picture the way I want it.

> Today I saw a boy in class standing in front of his drawing, working obviously hard, and he had his hand in his pocket. I wish I was good enough to stand with my free hand in my pocket while drawing. Not so much how or where my hand was, just be really good at "composing" rather than rendering.

Art teachers want students to learn how to work top-down, "composing," rather than trying to build their drawings from the bottom up. They prefer, in other words, a holistic approach.

### Using Active Learning to Improve Content Learning

In the traditional view of how learning occurs, the teacher is a repository of knowledge that is poured into the heads of students through lectures. Education is seen as the transfer of content knowledge (rather than the development of a critical sense or the ability to talk and write like a member of the discipline). At each level of education, traditional teachers feel that their job is to introduce students to the basics, to give them the knowledge that they can use at the next higher level. Thus, the acquisition of procedural skills is continually put off.

Traditional teachers are reluctant to give up lecture time for active learning activities because they fear that their subject will not get covered and that their students will fail to learn the appropriate amount of information. We believe that active learning can broaden learning to include procedural knowledge without loss of content learning. And, in fact, active learning may even enhance content learning, judged by the recall of factual information on the traditionalist's own exams.

I approached two more colleagues who were interested in employing active learning strategies in their art appreciation and art history courses. Phil Schaltenbrand and Richard Miecznikowski are art teachers who are traditional in their method of slide-show lectures. Their students sit in a darkened room taking notes while their teacher discusses a masterpiece reproduced by a slide projected on a screen.

We decided that their students would write for about an hour in class six times throughout the semester, attempting to imitate their teacher's sophisticated responses to art works. We thought it would help if students began with a personal, expressionistic kind of written response in which they noted what they saw and the holistic effect of the art work. They would then compose a more formal essay, using their original impressions, but adding historical background and formal analysis. We provided students with examples of the kinds of writing we were looking for, both the expressionistic response and the more formal response.

The in-class writing did not constitute direct exam preparation, i.e., the exams did not ask questions on art works that were written about during the writing-to-learn sessions. Although the students were encouraged in the writing-to-learn exercises to place works in an historical context, most of their writing focused on aesthetic analysis rather than display of factual knowledge. The writing was not done as an aid to memorization. Instead, the writing emphasized aesthetic evaluation—a kind of procedural knowledge—not factual recall of content. Our belief was that, whatever other benefits students may derive from practice at analyzing art works, by writing about art in a manner similar to the way their teacher talks about art, students develop a keener interest in art, become more engaged by the course, become more involved in their own education, and show up to class more alert and better able to follow the teacher's lectures. The increased engagement with the subject, we hypothesized, would compensate for lost lecture time, and might even improve scores on tests of factual content beyond the scores attained by students who heard more lectures but did no writing, whose learning, in other words, was entirely passive.

We decided that teacher responses to in-class writings would take several forms: (1) cheerleading, done to encourage students to write freely, without apprehension, and to show students that they are succeeding in learning, (2) correction, done to provide a means of directly teaching one-to-one through the in-class writings, and (3) modeling sophisticated expressive and professional responses to the art work, done to help students internalize procedural knowledge.

The general outcome of this experiment was quite positive. Both art teachers felt that the journal writing had improved learning. Both were pleasantly surprised by the sophistication of much of the student writing.

The Schaltenbrand study was somewhat spoiled by the fact that the control group—the non-writing class—turned out to be the best group of students ever to take Phil's course, scoring higher on his tests than any past class. The journal writers, however, also scored high on the exams, almost as high as the "super class" on test after test. We felt it was reasonable to conclude that in this case the journal writing had, at least, done no harm in regard to acquisition of content knowledge.

The Miecznikowski study did not have any such problem. His course was for students who already had some background in art history. The journal writers started out knowing less about art, as measured by a pretest, but outscored the nonwriters on both the factual parts of the final exam and on a repetition of the same pretest, given at the end of the semester. Here it seemed likely that the journals not only did not interfere with content learning, but even increased such learning—despite the fact that the in-class writing displaced half a dozen lectures. In addition, students in both of the journal writing classes may have experienced learning that we did not test for, such as increased critical thinking ability.

### Conclusion

We are not against lectures, presentations, textbook reading assignments, and other forms of direct instruction, but we too often find direct instruction methods being used exclusively, in isolation from the active learning approaches that would make learning whole. Active learning requires components in which the students engage in projects or observations of their own, leading to their own personalized learning, while the teacher temporarily steps back and monitors (and perhaps coaches). We have found that active learning episodes, when introduced into lecture courses, seem to increase the learning of content knowledge from those lectures. Apparently, when students are actively engaged in their own learning, they listen to lectures in a different way. Lectures can become a form of active rather than passive learning.

Active learning integrates language and performance activities in the spirit of whole language. It might involve research (both library and field), performance (dance, choral, dramatic), listening to and/or watching something (a concert, a radio program, a fish tank, a film, a conference presentation, a real life scene of people working or learning). It might involve drawing, filming, recording, helping, or teaching. It is crucial that any out-of-class activities are connected to academic work, and journal writing is one way to do that.

In conclusion, our analysis confirmed the following active learning functions of journals:

- Journals reveal successes that the teacher wouldn't otherwise notice;
- Journals allow the teacher to give encouragement when the student is feeling the normal frustrations of learning;
- Journals identify students with "apprehension," i.e., serious attitude problems;

- Journals reveal important changes in attitude;
- Journals alert the teacher when a large part of the class is having trouble understanding a concept;
- Journals allow the teacher to help students identify specifically their problems in learning;
- Journals provide the teacher with a way to instruct and guide students individually;
- Journals confirm for the teacher the effectiveness of successful teaching techniques;
- Journals inform teachers when a student's personal problems are interfering with her learning; and,
- Journals document learning and enthusiasm for the subject.

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS—PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always welcomed.

Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In particular, upcoming issues will have these themes:

February 1994 (November 1 deadline):
**Hiring, Leading, Resuscitating: Leadership for Excellence**

May 1994 (February 1 deadline):
**Best and the Brightest: Innovation and Teaching**

October 1994 (July 1 deadline):
**Case Studies of Chairs**
guest editor: Henry Kiernan
Southern Regional High School District of Ocean County
Manahawkin, New Jersey 08050 (609-597-9481)

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25 or 3.5 inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced typed copy. Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor, *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326. (FAX 412-738-2098)

### Call for Classroom Vignettes

The National Standards Project for English and Language Arts, conducted by NCTE, IRA, and the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, is seeking descriptions of classroom experiences that exemplify good practice, grades K–12. You are invited to submit one or more brief vignettes (2–4 double-spaced typewritten pages) that clearly depict classroom interactions and events that might be used to flesh out a goal or standard. For example, if your goal is that students should respond to each other's poems, state that goal. You might then tell briefly how the groups were organized, and go on to describe a specific student small group interaction that was productive. After the description, please write two or three paragraphs that provide an explanation of the value of the classroom experience.

The task forces that are preparing the standards documents hope to select from a large body of vignettes those that best exemplify and clarify the evolving standards. The task forces also welcome your comments and ideas other than vignettes, but they are particularly seeking classroom-oriented materials at this time. Please include your name, address, and school and home numbers with your vignette(s). Submissions will not be returned, but you will be notified if your material is to be included in a National Standards Project document. For further information, call Carolyn Hill or Liz Spalding at NCTE (217-328-3870).

## MEMBERSHIPS AVAILABLE IN CEL COMMISSIONS

A limited number of memberships in CEL's recently formed commissions will be available to interested CEL members. If you would like to be considered for membership in one of the groups below, prepare a one-page letter explaining your interest in the focus of the commission. Give pertinent information on your background, along with your present professional work. Address the letter to Candace Fatemi, Administrative Assistant to the Deputy Executive Director, NCTE, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801-1096. CEL commission members are required to participate in committee deliberations and exchange ideas via correspondence, and are strongly urged to attend committee meetings held at the Annual Convention.

Five of the commissions share a similar charge, distinguished only by the details of locale or teaching level.

CEL Commission on English/Language Arts Leadership in:

1. Urban Schools—Pearline Humbles, Washington, D.C.
2. Rural Schools—Bill Mull, Roseburg, OR
3. Elementary Schools—Kathleen Strickland, Pittsburgh, PA
4. Middle/Junior High Schools—Kathy Bellin, Arvada, CO
5. Independent Schools—Wanda Porter, Honolulu, HI

   These commission's goals involve support of leaders in their efforts to deliver quality curricula and instruction in English/language arts in urban, rural, elementary, middle/junior high, and independent schools. The commissions will address these goals by identifying issues; providing forums and networks; disseminating information and research among practitioners; and educating decision-makers about key issues.

6. Commission on Research into Practice: Issues in English/Language Arts, Nina Bono, Chair, St. Louis, MO

   This commission's charge is to study processes of change as they affect leaders in English/language arts, attempting to bring research findings into classrooms and staff development activities; to present successful models of such change through conference presentations, workshops, and journal articles.

7. Commission on Developing English/Language Arts Leadership, Bill Weber, Chair, Libertyville, IL

   This commission's charge is to research and publicize programs and practices in the preparation and development of leaders in English/language arts; to bring this information to the membership through public recognition of exemplary programs, through leadership training workshops, and journal articles.

# ELECTION SLATE 1993

## CANDIDATES FOR MEMBERS-AT-LARGE (Vote for Two)

**JEFF GOLUB,** Assistant Professor of English Education, Department of Secondary Education, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL 33620. **Services to Profession:** Currently serving as liaison between CEL and CEE Executive Boards; presenter at CEL program in Louisville (1992); served as Representative-at-Large on the NCTE Executive Committee; member of NCTE's Secondary Section Steering Committee; member, Commission on Curriculum; Chair, *Classroom Practices* Committee; Program Chair for the 1986 NCTE Spring Regional Conference in Phoenix. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** Editor, *Activities to Promote Critical Thinking* and *Focus on Collaborative Learning,* both published by NCTE; Editor, "Computers in the Classroom" and "JH/MS Idea Factory" columns in *English Journal;* Received the State Farm "Good Neighbor" award for innovative teaching, September 1991; Won *English Journal*'s Writing Award (with Louann Reid, co-author), 1989; Participant in the English Coalition Conference, July 1987.

**Position Statement:** CEL's success as an agent for change and improvement of English instruction is due to its presentation of innovative instructional options for its members to consider. For years now, I have worked within NCTE to introduce my own innovations and bring about needed changes. This is why I want to contribute to CEL's efforts. We are both moving in the same direction and sharing the same vision and insights.

**PEARLINE R. HUMBLES,** Instructional Supervisor, District of Columbia Public Schools System Curriculum and Instruction Branch, Office of Educational Programs and Operations, Langdon Administrative Unit 20th and Evarts Streets, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20018. **Services to Profession:** Past treasurer and president of D.C. Council of Teachers of English Cochair of NCTE Spring Conference (1992); Conference presenter and facilitator at numerous NCTE conventions; State leader for literary magazines for 5+ years. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** Teacher of the Year at Terrell Junior High School (selected by student body).

**Position Statement:** There is a sense that everyone who has attended school feels that he or she knows what educators should be and how they should operate, and what schools should be and how they should operate. While the input of all members of society is vital, if we are to educate our children, there must be deep involvement of those of us with educational expertise in the standard setting process. As we move to the 21st century, we must be in the forefront of developing lifelong learners.

**DIANE S. ISAACS,** District Coordinator for English, Manhasset, Long Island, NY (former teacher, Nyack High School, Nyack, NY.) **Services to Profession:** English chair, grades 7–12, Middle and High School, 1988–1992 Adjunct Professor of English, Fordham University, New York. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** Judge, National Scholastic Writing Awards (11th Graders), NCTE Judge, Promising Young Writers Program (8th Graders), NCTE 1992, "The Italian Response to the Holocaust," NCTE 1979–1992; book reviewer for *Choice,* articles in *English Journal, The Harlem Renaissance—An Historical Dictionary* (Greenwood Press); *Dictionary of Literary Biography;* and *Jewish Women's Studies Guide.*

**Position Statement:** Supervising the teaching of English often proves to be complex, weighing needs of pure teaching against the needs of school boards and administrators; threading one's way through the thicket of alternative ways to teach and what to teach; sorting through elemental issues, from pupil-teacher ratios and class size to developing human relations skills that motivate one's teaching peers instead of intimidating them. In sum, supervision is all about helping teachers be the best they can be, about creating an environment in which learning can soar.

CEL affords supervisors a critical vehicle for advancing the special issues of English supervision and offers a network for mutual support. I have spent thirty energetic years—as teacher, administrator, curriculum specialist, parent, student, teacher trainer, and mentor—trying to improve English education. Serving as a CEL member-at-large would allow me to harness that experience and focus it on accomplishing the most good for the profession.

**BILL NEWBY,** Chair, Curriculum and Instruction, Shaker Heights High School, 15911 Aldersyde Drive, Shaker Heights, OH 44120. **Services to Profession:** 1989–present, NCTE Committee on Language and Learning Across the Curriculum 1990–92, Program Director, English Fall workshops, North East Ohio Education Association. **Professional Contributions and Honors:** Fellowships: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1986; North East Ohio Writing [illegible]ject, 1988; 1991–present, English Department Head Liaison, Ohio Council of Teachers of English and Language Arts.

**Position Statement:** Leaders serve in many ways. They work to invigorate the weary, focus the distracted, inspire the demoralized, unify the isolated, and coordinate the many. They must listen, study, weigh, decide, recruit, involve, promote, manage, support, and step aside. And they must do this integrating their knowledge of our profession's most forward thinking and research and their unique local circumstances. I believe CEL's role is to foster this kind of leadership, to help English leaders find practical steps to reach the visionary, and to support them when their crusades are slow and lonely. For over a decade I have been the beneficiary of CEL's stimulation and support, and it would be an honor to repay that debt as this organization continues its efforts to nurture current and future English leaders.

## BALLOT INSTRUCTIONS

The CEL Bylaws permit members to vote either by mail or at the CEL business session of the annual fall conference. Each member mailing a ballot should mark it and mail it in an envelope with a **return name and address** to Susan Benjamin, Highland Park High School, 433 Vine, Highland Park, IL 60035. Please mark "Ballot" on the outside of the envelope.

Ballots must be postmarked **no later than November 1, 1993.** Members who prefer voting at the conference will be given a ballot and an envelope at the business session of CEL. An institution with membership may designate one individual as the one person to vote on its behalf. Please list the institution name and address on the outside of the envelope.

## CEL ELECTION SLATE 1993

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# ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY

**Conference on English Leadership**

Volume 15, Number 4
December 1993
Editor: James Strickland

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## In This Issue

### A LOVE OF LITERATURE

by James Strickland, editor

For years I have been asking my first-year college students three questions on the first day of class: What was the last movie you saw? What was the last recorded music you bought? What was the last book you read on your own? While the first two questions generate answers in keeping with current cinematic and musical trends, the last question receives the same answer year after year: I don't read. Over half my students admit they cannot remember the last book they read on their own, and many cannot remember the last one they were made to read in school. And every year I wonder what has happened to these young people. I know from watching children—our own, our nieces, our nephews, their cousins and friends—and from reports of elementary teachers across the country that young children love to read. So I wonder year after year what happens between primary grades and first-year college to make them nonreaders.

I've had my suspicions, but recently I gathered some hard evidence, anecdotal though it may be. A graduate student in our reading program was formulating a research project investigating the criteria children use when selecting their reading. She had approached several faculty members to get suggestions for pertinent research to pursue and found that while many teachers encourage children to choose their own books, no one seemed to have actually catalogued the criteria children use. Our graduate student made the mistake of trying one more source, the professor who teaches "Children's Literature." When she asked about criteria for selection, the professor answered, "You don't let them choose, my dear. Why that would be as foolish as letting children choose the food they wanted to eat. If you took that approach, why, they'd be existing on a diet of junk food. No, my dear, we have to make the selection for them. We are the ones who know what will nourish them." There it is—the answer. Children stop reading because we stop letting them choose the things they enjoy, forcing them instead to eat what's good for them. Rather than developing a taste for what is wholesome and nutritious, teachers and a standardized curriculum make the choices for them until the children finally rebel and revel in empty calories. Instead of talking about books and the responses they provoke and inspire, we would rather analyze the main characters, trace the plot summary, and discover the uses of irony and metaphor. Ugh. Pass the Doritos.

The authors of the articles in this issue share a love of literature, a love that they wish to share with their students and their fellow teachers.

Lee Williams, a former high school teacher currently finishing her doctoral studies under Richard and Jo Anne Vacca at Kent State in Ohio, studies the methods that teachers use to introduce literature to their students and finds that because of unexamined beliefs about the nature of reading, we simply replicate the class-

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rooms where we were successful, unintentionally denying students the very essence of reading—constructing meaning.

M. P. Cavanaugh, coordinator of elementary education at Cleveland's John Carroll University, uses integrated teaching to help her preservice teacher candidates and inservice teachers find a common ground among literature, science, mathematics, and social studies. As examples of integrated teaching, she shares three literature-based integrated units that her students developed for their student teaching experiences.

Carol Jago, award-winning writer and teacher-researcher, offers another way to express a love of literature: memorization. The key to memorization is freedom of choice: Our daughter Laura was required to memorize the funeral speech from *Julius Caesar* and doesn't remember a word of it; her mother was encouraged to memorize her favorite poem, *Annabel Lee*, and can still recite it for me thirty years later. At Santa Monica High School in California, Carol asks her students to learn some lines of poetry by heart, not because it will make them better orators or more literary but because it will give them a way to hold the words close to their hearts.

Eileen Oliver, currently a professor at Washington State University, describes a literature course she taught to a "mixed bag" of seniors when she was at a high school located on the coast side of the San Francisco peninsula. Instinctively Eileen knew that the key to success was finding contemporary literature that spoke to adolescent interests, allowing the students to choose and to recommend to classmates through discussions. This reading-workshop approach helped satisfy her goal for her students: "to give them the opportunity to develop a love for literature, a love they could take with them when they graduated."

On the other side of the continent, Rick Chambers of Grand River Collegiate Institute in Ontario, Canada, had the same goal for his students. He decided to take a chance, integrating personal response with the traditional literary response in class. What he found was that students need to make the literature their own, to "construct meaning," as Lee Williams says. Rick is convinced that students learn better when the teacher opens doors of inquiry for them rather than simply telling them information.

Janine Rider, a Colorado teacher at Mesa State College, pits the book-lovers against the movie-buffs and asks her students to tell her which is better, the book or the movie. Her students know it's a loaded question from their book-loving teacher, but nevertheless their answers show that they have considered both sides and gained something in the comparison. Although Janine uses *The Handmaid's Tale*, many books that have been given the Hollywood treatment come to mind—from *Howard's End* to *The Firm*.

Gerald Grunska, former teacher at Highland Park High School in Illinois and founding member of the organization that sponsors this publication, offers readers' theater—live performances of works of literature—as a way of making works come alive for students. Gerald recalls his collaborations with the drama teacher at Highland Park, Barbara Patterson, a teacher he calls "truly imaginative," a teacher who has seen her students graduate to Broadway, television, and the movies.

Unfortunately, whenever teachers get to celebrating a love of literature, others get nervous and want to censor what's being read. Beverly Haley, former teacher at Morgan County Community College and presently a writing consultant with her own company, The Language Works, says that when she recently watched the film *Manufacturing Consent*, she was reminded of the day Norma Gabler came to Fort Morgan. Seeing Norma Gabler in action was "an intense emotional experience," she says, one too easily shrugged off by those who did not share the experience personally. It made her want to "run out and warn everyone within hearing/reading distance." She feels her article is historical in one sense yet as fresh as this morning's news. We agree it's important to hear her warnings—censorship will not go away on its own.

Finally, Connie Fleeger, a whole language classroom teacher at Karns City High School in Pennsylvania, offers a software review of one of the major pieces of integrated software on the market today, the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment.

## READING LITERATURE AND MAKING MEANING

by Lee Williams
Kent State University, Ohio

When I was about ten, a favorite teacher suggested I read some adult novels and classic literature, and although I read in a very ten-year-old manner, the more sophisticated prose in no way constrained the pleasure I derived or the meanings I constructed from my first attempts at reading those books. I found that I could talk with the teacher about what I was reading, and we shared our insights into characters' personalities and our desires to physically transport ourselves to places that had become real though existing only in our heads and in the print on a page. We talked about what we liked and what we didn't like in the book, and I remember we were curious about the kind of person who could imagine those worlds, commingling our envy and admiration of such talent. In my own writing I tried to use some of the ways those authors wrote, giving me a new level on which to enter a book—the technical. Becoming a writer only added to my pleasure in reading, and I could appreciate a well-chosen word or a finely crafted sentence, marveling at its effects on my feelings. However, once I got to junior and senior high school English, we studied Literature, and studying Literature never seemed much like the reading I did when I read on my own.

I understand my own process of reading from a psycho-sociolinguist perspective—meaning is created through social uses of language; it is from this perspective that I try, in a classroom, to recreate that marvelous engagement with literature that depends on one's own reading and subsequent feelings and thinking for validation of meaning (with the class in the role of interpretive community), but that never depends on a teacher as the master of form, holding the key to unlock literature.

### Reader-Response Criticism, Reading Theory, and Lit Class

When I attended high school in the late 60s and when I taught it in the late 80s, an historical-New Critical approach to teaching literature was nearly universal. The typical class devoted time to

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*English Leadership Quarterly* (ISSN 1054-1578) is published in October, December, February, and May by the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Subscription price for the Conference on English Leadership, $10.00 per year. Add $2.00 per year for Canadian and all other international postage. Single copy, $2.50 ($1.50 members). Remittances should be made payable to NCTE by check, money order, or bank draft in U.S. currency. Communications regarding change of address should be addressed to the National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801-1096. Permission to reprint articles should be directed to the editor of *English Leadership Quarterly*.

studying the background of the author and his times (the male pronoun is used deliberately since the canon then consisted of authors only half-jokingly referred to as Dead White Men and Emily Dickinson). Reading consisted of an ongoing search for various "literary devices." The forms that individual works of writing took were treated as more important than any particular meaning we may have ascribed to the work. If meaning were to be ascribed at all, that was exclusively the domain of the teacher—the "expert" reader.

However, the literary theorists began to shift away from formalism, first positing the notion that meaning was a property of the language itself and not of any activity performed by the reader. Then theorists held that the reader actively participated in the production of textual meaning, and finally current theorists hold that the reader is the source of all possible meanings. The theory that gives readers responsibility for the meaning, which was formerly ascribed to the text itself, is generally known as reader-response criticism. Although reader-response as a theory is not conceptually unified, its proponents share the idea that reading is not what happens with the eyes, but rather what goes on behind them. To paraphrase Stanley Fish, sense is made in the reader's mind rather than on the printed page.

This notion, that linguistic and literary competence rather than the author's intention determines an individual reader's meanings, describes a different approach to classroom literary discourse than the one described by the metaphor of unlocking textual meaning. Reader-response criticism has no room for the author's intention, arguing that it is unknowable. Reader-response criticism argues that teachers are experts only because they have more competence through experience than do their students, not because they have inherently right answers. Meaning is contextually situated and changeable. Classroom activity should focus then on responding to literature, with class members functioning as an interpretative community that rhetorically constructs valid literary interpretations.

### The Context and the Assumptions

I have never heard anyone dispute that the fundamental work students must do in a literature class involves reading—whether at an elementary, secondary, or college level. Yet few English majors, even those preparing to be teachers, ever have preparation in reading theory. Where do we expect English teachers and future English teachers to get an understanding of the reading process and, therefore, of what to do with texts in a literature class?

Do classrooms exist like those suggested by reader-response theorists, ones organized to help readers construct meaning in literature through shared interpretation? Do literature teachers reflect this notion that reading is not so much finding meaning inherent in an objective text as it is the creation of meaning by a particular reader with a particular set of experiences, that competent readers may not have better skills, but rather more experience, with both the ideas set forth in the text and with reading itself? What might high school English teachers say, I wondered, about the relationship between what they believe and what they do? To learn more about what literature teachers may be doing at the high school level in terms of reading, I talked with two cooperating teachers for the student teachers I am currently supervising. Both teachers currently teach several sections of eleventh-grade General English; one teaches two sections of academic-track twelfth-grade English as well. I asked them to respond to concerns that I had, as a teacher of content area reading for preservice teachers, about the reading of literature. I asked five questions:

1. What is the role of reading in your classroom?
2. What are your goals as a teacher in terms of your students' reading?
3. What do you/your students do before an upcoming reading assignment?
4. What do students do when they read "well" for English class?
5. How important is it that a student read in order to be successful in your class?

I also talked with all the teachers about their expectations for their student teachers, and observed short, fifteen-minute segments of their classroom teaching. My assumption is that a teacher's methodology in the classroom reflects the teacher's beliefs (or theories) about what reading and literature are, and are for, even if these theories are not consciously articulated. From these interviews and my observations, I inferred a sense of the tacit theory each teacher holds in terms of textual meaning, how it is created, and the role of the teacher in facilitating a student's comprehension of textual meaning.

In the twenty-plus years since I have been a student in high school, and in the five years since I last taught in high school, little seems to have changed. Although both teachers told me that reading was important (one said, "I can't stress the importance of reading enough!"), they also said that a student who listened in class and took careful notes could do well in class without reading. I take this to mean that these teachers believed that whether heard about or read, the meaning is the same. Meaning in literature is objective; it can be gotten out and paraded around (the old notes-and-lecture method). By way of contrast, in a class wherein meaning is believed to be created in the reader's transaction with the text, there is no way to do well without reading because without reading there is no meaning.

The historical-New Critical approach is alive and well with the teachers at this particular high school. Both teachers offer a lecture about the life and times of an author as the prereading exercise for their students. The author's intention is still the primary motivation for comprehension, and understanding the historical context of the written work is still a device for the understanding of the author's intended meaning.

For example, I observed one cooperating teacher and a student teacher team-teaching "The Prologue" from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. While in the classroom, I was reminded of how wild and funny and almost contemporary the Wife of Bath sounds, carrying on as she does about relationships between men and women. My appreciation as a reader came from the wife's comments on the roles men and women played then and the similarity of gender roles today; that allowed me to construct the wife as a woman and a person, not merely a character in a book. As a reader, I found that I later added an intellectual understanding as a cloak over my initial emotional response of pleasure and recognition and agreement (for example, by detailing Chaucer's use of evocative language). But intellectual response is always a second response, and it has nothing to do with understanding any literary device or the historical context of a pilgrimage to Canterbury. How disappointed I was when both teacher and student teacher cut off the students' talk about the roles of men and women in the high school to "focus more clearly on the text." Only the teacher's response counted, even though that response was built on numerous readings of that text and hundreds of readings of other similar and different texts.

I was most surprised, however, by response to my question about what it means to "read well" in literature class. My own response to that question, I believe, would be that reading well is connecting one's own experiences to the text to create meaning.

Frankly, I was taken aback by the teachers' answers. Neither teacher responded to the question of reading well by referring to connection or construction of meaning or to the teacher's role in these processes. I expected answers about meaning, but I got answers about the SQ3R study system and advice to read the text twice.

In response to my question of how the teachers would evaluate their students' reading of literary works, I heard clearly their sense of reading as uncovering the objective meaning. One teacher responded, "A great deal of time is spent in class discussion because I can get a general assessment of the entire class's grasp of the material. I can make needed adjustments . . . permitting students time to interact with my additional thoughts. The basic criteria used to judge student progress is the test and the essay. The A paper is one which is mechanically clean and expresses ideas clearly and logically."

While this teacher is fair, caring, and concerned that students do good work, he organized his instruction around the transmission of facts rather than the construction of meaning. I see a teacher who is attempting to control what is learned while claiming reading is an integral aspect of the class. For this teacher, discussion is not used to construct meaning in an interpretive community, but to allow the teacher to "adjust" the students' understandings and to have them "interact with [the teacher's] thoughts." The teacher is interested not in how students put their own meanings together, but rather in testing their grasp of the meaning inherent in the text. The orientation of such teaching is product (test and essay) rather than process (constructing learning).

This classroom echoes the model of education that Paulo Freire labeled the banking method, a model wherein the knowledge is deposited and held by the teacher and the students make withdrawals at the "bank." Rather than empowering students to construct meaning, thereby becoming independent learners, the banking model insists that the student continue to turn to authority for verification of facts.

### Conclusion and Further Questions

My initial curiosity as to what impact the theoretical move to reader-response theory has had on secondary school literature classes led to the informal study of two well-respected English teachers and the methods they use to introduce their students to literary works. I would not generalize by applying these findings as they stand to other classrooms or to other schools, but I believe the type of literature classroom I described is far more common than a classroom organized to help students construct meaning, to help them move from an initial emotional response to a more carefully considered and intellectually reasoned response, one based on the first emotional one, and refined in the interpretive community of the literature classroom.

I worry that when we insist that our own readings are the only valid ones, we inadvertently send a message to our students about the purpose of reading and the nature of meaning that keeps our students from developing into mature, critical readers, or worse—keeps them from becoming readers, period. Separating school reading from real reading gives students the notion that literature is something they cannot understand. And what one cannot understand, one can never love. Our students may not be illiterate, but they will be alliterate.

Why is it this way? My guess is that most English teachers were successful in classrooms where the "banking method" was the dominant teaching method, ones where New Criticism shaped their understanding of what it means to read literature. When we create our own classrooms, too often we simply replicate the classrooms where we were successful. The implications of such methodology is troubling, however. Unexamined beliefs about the nature of reading drive a classroom practice that prohibits students from becoming proficient readers because it denies the very essence of reading—constructing meaning.

Some teachers are beginning to change their approaches to teaching literature, however. We need to nurture such teachers, instead of criticizing them for being "touchy-feely" or for not holding onto some "standard of excellence." We need to rethink our assumptions and beliefs and ask ourselves, "What is reading for? Why do I teach literature?"

## INTEGRATED TEACHING: A COMMON GROUND AMONG LITERATURE, SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS, AND SOCIAL STUDIES

by M. P. Cavanaugh
John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio

Learners have a far better chance at comprehension and retention of both broad conceptual issues and supporting details if the information is presented in an integrated format. We believe in an interdisciplinary approach to teaching wherever practical and purposeful, but we recognize the difficulty of such an approach as well as the challenge inherent in all good teaching. Since this kind of teaching—integrated thinking, planning, presenting, and working—does not naturally emerge in the classroom for many reasons, not least of which is the structural organization of our schools, we must promote this interdisciplinary approach as an alternative to the traditional program.

### Literature-Based Instruction

During the semester prior to their student teaching, our undergraduate elementary majors take three courses concurrently—Children's Literature/Language Arts, Social Studies, and Science/Mathematics. The instructors of these courses plan together and often present the course material together, although students enroll in these as separate and distinct courses.

Early in the semester, we present an example of an integrated lesson for our students. We do this for two reasons. One is to provide our students with an example of how they might teach an integrated lesson. The other is to have them begin to think about the Integrated Theme Project they must develop as a major aspect of these three courses.

This year we used Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Philomel 1969) as the basis of our integrated unit; we each demonstrated how one could teach language arts, social studies, mathematics, and science through fiction and nonfiction books about butterflies, metamorphosis, and change in many realms, both human-made and natural.

As the Children's Literature/Language Arts instructor, I support the basic belief that literature has multiple uses in all disciplines and that all disciplines call on the language arts in teaching and in learning. Thus, I believe literature can provide the interest and motivation for a study of science and writing that can help students both think through an issue and organize their thoughts prior to a discussion in social science. I offer my students as many examples of literature as possible, and I also teach them how to become discerning readers so that they can select literature on the basis of their determination of its merit and its possible connection with other disciplines. In many cases, our students will have to develop their own curriculum, and we attempt to give them an adequate basis upon which to do this.

As I am doing this, I also explain and model how they as teachers can use literature to teach and reinforce reading, writing, listening, and speaking. With an enjoyable piece of literature, one can teach story structure, analysis, and summarization. I suggest to my students that children might enjoy Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (Harper 1963) rather than chapter and textbook examples of those features. And even as I am doing that, I am aware of the curriculum of both the social studies and the mathematics/science courses so that I can connect the literature and the methods in an interdisciplinary way. For example, we might be teaching immigration in social studies, migration in science, and graphing in mathematics; I can complement these lessons with writing assignments such as an essay on the feelings of the new immigrants or a short story on immigrant experiences. We can read stories that reflect such experiences, such as *Streets of Gold* by Karen Bransom (Putnam 1981) and *Molly's Pilgrim* by Barbara Cohen (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard 1983).

### Integrated Theme Projects

Our students develop an integrated theme project as a major assignment. They must determine key concepts and skills from the major curricular disciplines along with adjunct areas such as art, music, physical education, health, and the community and weave them together under a larger issue or theme umbrella. Myriad topics were developed, such as Mystery, Getting to Know You, The Olympics, Water, Change, Communities, The Seven Continents, and Tracing Our Heritage.

Allow me to discuss some others in detail. One student developed a unit on the struggles of the pioneers, "Westward Expansion." The literature of this unit included Carol Brink's *Caddie Woodlawn* (Macmillan 1973), Laurie Lawlor's *Addie across the Prairie* and *Addie's Dakota Winter* (Albert Whitman & Company 1985), Patricia MacLachlan's *Sarah, Plain and Tall* (HarperCollins 1985), Miriam Mason's *Caroline and Her Kettle Named Maud* (Macmillan 1951), Brett Harvey's *My Prairie Year* (Holiday 1986), and the Laura Ingalls Wilder series. The elementary school children for whom this unit was developed were to write memoirs of the people about whom they were reading, stage plays involving pioneer life, read and write Western poems and tall-tales, and write letters to the chambers of commerce of Western towns to learn about how the communities changed over time. They would also research transportation, weather, geography, heroes, legends, and the roles of family members, and they would develop a time line of events showing the period of Western expansion in American and world history.

Another student developed a unit she named "Patterns." The elementary school children for whom this unit was developed were to read, listen, and write with a conscious awareness of patterns. They were to observe how songs follow a pattern and use repetition. They were to study the weather in almanacs and construct graphs that reveal weather patterns. They were to study the classifications of flowers, trees, and insects and develop charts that show patterns. They were to read literature such as Karen Bransom's *Streets of Gold* (Putnam 1981), Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (HarperCollins 1975) and *Mountain Light* (HarperCollins 1985), Joan Lingard's *Between Two Worlds* (Lodestar Books 1991), and Barbara Cohen's *Molly's Pilgrim* (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard 1983), and from their reading collect data on why people moved to America. With their data, they would construct graphs that show patterns. By reading from Kenneth Koch and Kate Farrell's *Talking to the Sun* (Henry Holt 1985), Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Child's Garden of Verse* (Oxford 1885/1945), Robert Frost's *You Come Too* (Holt 1959), and David McCord's *Far and Few* (Little, Brown 1952), elementary school children see that poems follow patterns. Finally, reviewing the journal they have kept during the course of the unit, they seek patterns in their own thinking and writing.

A third example of a student's unit was "Explorations, Risks, and Rewards: A Study of Renaissance and Modern Exploration." In this unit, children for whom this unit was developed were to learn and compare the needs, desires, and goals of ancient exploration, current exploration, and futuristic exploration. Their reading included biographies, such as Barbara Brenners's *On the Frontier with Mr. Audubon* (Coward McCann 1977), Vicki Cobb's *Truth on Trial: The Story of Galileo Galilei* (Coward McCann 1979), and Sam and Beryl Epstein's *She Never Looked Back: Margaret Mead in Samoa* (Coward McCann 1980); science fiction, such as Jerome Beatty's *Matthew Looney and the Space Pirates* (Young Scott Books 1972), Eleanor Cameron's *Stowaway to the Mushroom Planet* (Little, Brown 1956), Louis Slobodkin's *The Space Ship under the Apple Tree* (Macmillan 1952), and Jay Williams and Raymond Abrahkin's *Danny Dunn and the Antigravity Paint* (McGraw-Hill 1964). The entire class also reads Peter Roop's *I Columbus*, developing an understanding of the goals of explorers and an appreciation of the value of maintaining a log, and E. L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (Atheneum 1967), comparing Claudia's leadership to that of other explorers. As part of a writing workshop the children maintained an ongoing process of rewriting, editing, writing final drafts of stories, research projects, charts, and time lines. As extensions of the literature, they would create a play, a skit, a puppet show, a filmstrip, a cartoon, a comic book, a storybook, a diorama, a debate, a mural, a game, or any other creative project to tell the class about their book.

### Inservicing the Classroom Teachers

Throughout the semester, our students are working in elementary school classrooms, observing and implementing interdisciplinary teaching and learning methods such as using literature in a science or mathematics lesson, incorporating art appreciation in a reading lesson, or writing in a physical education class. The following semester, they will do their student teaching in the same classroom. The time they spend in the elementary classroom prior to student teaching helps them learn about the teacher, the students, the school, and the daily routine. It is through this avenue that we are able to offer the schools an alternative to the traditional program. Some of the schools with which we work use a theme approach and are eager to learn new techniques and to add to their knowledge base in the individual disciplines. These teachers are usually eager to learn from our students. Both the classroom teacher and our preservice students work together conceptualizing and implementing the integrated theme project.

Unfortunately, we have more students than we have available interdisciplinary classrooms, so some of our students are assigned to teachers and classrooms which follow a more traditional approach. While our students are looking for an integrated approach to teaching, they see a segmented and unconnected one being used. They want to begin practicing their belief in an integrated curriculum. In such cases, some kind of discomfort occurs and the teachers and our students both feel tension.

This kind of tension has been called cognitive dissonance—a mismatch between the facts and our expectations, a psychological discomfort that occurs in the presence of inconsistency. For example, our students have felt this dissonance as they have observed social studies taught as a separate lesson with no connection to literature or science or mathematics. Our students realize that the classroom teacher knows only one way to teach—the way he or she has always taught and possibly the way they were taught themselves. The teachers begin to feel some dissonance when they hear about what our students are learning and begin to see the development of the integrated theme project. The conversations that inevitably occur between our students and the classroom teachers create a potential for change. If the dialogue between our students and the classroom teachers is successful, our students remain in that classroom for their student teaching semester and they are often allowed, if not encouraged, to teach their integrated theme project. It is our belief that this "dynamic tension" can cause experimentation and result in an integrated curriculum.

We have also been fortunate that even in some classrooms where the teachers have no desire for this kind of planning and teaching, they have been willing to listen to our students. In some cases, the teachers are even willing to have us come in to support and enhance what our students have been sharing, affording us the opportunity to demonstrate and practice what we preach.

This turn of events brings about the alternative programming of interdisciplinarity. The ultimate beneficiaries of all of this will be the elementary school children. But also benefitting will be our preservice students, the cooperating teachers, the school administration, and those of us at the university who need to work with and through the field-based classrooms.

## BY HEART: A CASE FOR MEMORIZATION

by Carol Jago
Santa Monica High School, California

Memorization has fallen on hard times. Considered old-fashioned and unduly prescriptive, it is no longer part of the repertoire of most English teachers. I fear that in abandoning memorization, we have lost a powerful strategy for developing students' speaking skills. Most of us have bits of Shakespeare rattling around our heads and hearts from assignments decades old. When we know a poem by heart, we own it in a very special way. I want my students to have these pieces, too. I want them to own lines from Poe and Dickinson and Langston Hughes, lines whose words will resonate and grow with them. I want them to have words they can conjure with alongside Ice T's.

In some classrooms the study of poetry focuses on analysis. In others, the emphasis is on a reader's response to poems. What about the celebration of poetry as song? Many of our students come from cultures with strong oral traditions and have family members with formidable powers of recall for stories, songs, and prayers. By opening up our lessons to include memorization activities, we honor these traditions and allow students to shine who otherwise might never speak in front of the class.

Most students can succeed at this task because they need only choose a poem to their liking, commit it to memory, and recite it before the class. This is not as daunting as it might first appear. Teenagers know thousands of song lyrics and rap songs. We simply need to help them apply the techniques they instinctively use for lyrics to the memorization of poetry.

I have students brainstorm ways of learning something by heart. The techniques they offer are reading the poem over and over silently, saying the poem aloud (in the shower, if family members would laugh), copying the poem onto a card they can carry about, practicing with a partner or parent, reciting it to themselves as they perform a routine task like jogging, riding the bus, or washing their hair.

I then set out as many books of poetry as I can get my hands on so that students will have a wide range of poems and poets to choose from. My not-so-hidden agenda here is to have students read dozens of poems as they search for the one that "sings" to them. I usually set length guidelines, but regularly make exceptions for students who particularly love a short Langston Hughes poem or who want to recite the whole of "The Raven." I also want students to see how poems live in the real world, that is, in slim books by individual authors, not solely in the weighty anthologies they have come to hate so well. I allow them only a few days to commit the poem to memory because more time only serves to build up tension.

Parents love this assignment. It reminds them of when they were in school and gives them a chance to help out with homework. While parents might not be able to remember their algebra, they can serve as a friendly ear and prompter for their children as they memorize poems. Parents also love to make suggestions about what their child should learn by heart.

On the day of our performance I ask for someone to be the prompter, and I ask this person to take a seat front and center. Volunteers go first, and then I proceed in reverse alphabetical order. I am very agreeable to passing by a student who is not ready, but I insist that we will come back to him or her. Do some whisper in a voice heard only by angels? Yes, but what is important is that they stood up and recited; and, as long as they do this, they get an A for the task.

Students need practice speaking in front of an audience. With budget cuts, public speaking electives and debate teams have disappeared from many school programs. If students are to get the practice they need, we will have to integrate more speaking skills into the English curriculum. Having students memorize poems is a simple way to begin the process of integrating speaking skills into our curriculum. Fortunately, students do not need special textbooks, nor do teachers need inservice workshops or how-to manuals to do this. The basis of effective public speaking is common sense: open your mouth, turn up the volume, avoid distracting twitches, and look at your audience. The friendly family of their English class can help prepare them for the tougher audiences ahead: making oral presentations for social studies, giving campaign speeches for student government elections, and pleading a case before the principal or parole board.

Outside the literature itself, I do not believe that there is much in the teaching of English that students should commit to memory. Pablo Neruda's love poetry will do more for teenagers than any list of literary devices. Let's help them get it by heart.

## CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE, HETEROGENEOUS STYLE

by Eileen Oliver
Washington State University, Pullman, Washington

When I offered a "Contemporary Literature" course for seniors at Terra Nova High School in Pacifica, California, an all-white lower- to middle-class working community, I made no prerequisites. I opened it up to "all comers," and that is pretty much what I got. There were college-bound students whose literary experiences had been in the "classical tradition." There were other students who chose the class because, even though they had struggled through our "lower" track, they still needed an English course to graduate. Still others, those not particularly motivated to exert themselves, figured that "just reading" didn't sound too bad. Because of "the demand" for the course (and the fact that there were no other electives at this hour), forty students enrolled.

I knew from the beginning that neither the traditional approach to teaching literature nor unified units of study would work for this "mixed bag" of students. And, because experience told me that heterogeneous groups provide for much more interesting discussions, I absolutely refused to consider tracking students within the class. Further, having spent several years teaching courses in our department in all of the required tracks, I know that adolescent interests have less to do with intelligence than with age. That is, teens are interested in adolescent issues no matter how their abilities are labeled by objective tests.

Although I have not taught high school for several years, it seems to me now that the structure of my "Contemporary Literature" course was a precursor to a lot of the literature workshops I read about today and observe in a number of "reading" classes. I advocate this model in my methods classes as somewhere in between a direct-teaching, whole-class strategy and a reading workshop.

We began the "Contemporary Literature" class by spending the first few days talking about various contemporary writers and readers and eliminating "the correct answer" approach that some of them believed was the only way to read. I said that we would form "reading groups," much the way people formed "book clubs" to discuss the literature they read.

Next, I presented the class with a number of books from which I expected each student to make a choice. In my "booktalks," I spent time giving information about the author of each work, reading a few selected parts, and telling why I thought each work might be interesting to read. The books I picked were selections that I or one of my colleagues had had prior success with, and I made sure that the materials were accessible (no small task in a school where books are shared by a number of teachers). Finally, I chose a variety of novels that could be read by students with a variety of reading levels.

Although a little dated, the categories and some of the related books are illustrative:

**Science Fiction:** *Clockwork Orange; Childhood's End; The Martian Chronicles*

**African American Experience:** *Black Boy; Autobiography of Malcolm X; I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

**Native American Experience:** *Little Big Man; Light in the Forest* (books I would now replace with Native American writers)

**Teenagers in Stress:** *Catcher in the Rye; A Separate Peace; The Chocolate War; Bless the Beasts and the Children*

**Drama:** *Jesus Christ, Superstar; West Side Story; Raisin in the Sun*

**Romance:** *Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones; Love Story; The War on Villa Street*

I started by giving each group a reading schedule, some general study questions to consider, and a specific section of the room. (I reserved a large choir room for this class so we would have enough space to spread out.) Every day students read for a few minutes while I went around to see how each group was doing. Sometimes I gave individual groups questions that related directly or indirectly to their reading for that week. Other times I told them to create their own topics of discussion and assigned a recorder to report what took place after they met.

They wrote book reviews, critiques, and "adaptations" of novels. I asked some to design questions for future groups. This strategy was particularly helpful for students who had difficulty with the reading. Not only did they feel that they were contributing in a positive way to someone else's future reading experience, but they also found that the activity helped their own comprehension. Further, I could tell by their questions how well they were comprehending what they were reading.

At times groups discussed for half the class and read for the other half. I required that each student keep track of his or her individual work. At various stages students wrote responses, both formal and informal. My role was one of roving facilitator.

Very often students finished their books long before the others and started another novel that was related to the central book chosen by the group. They then shared their information and impressions of the new book, offering recommendations to others during class meetings. After a while, everyone was reading his or her own book and periodically bringing to the group some new aspect of previously discussed issues.

Predictably, students found each other's recommendations more valid than mine, and the interchange among them was exciting to watch. Some students who had heretofore been in "lower ability" classes were recommending books to "college-bound" students. We shifted groups periodically, and I brought in new topics and books. What pleased me most was that students of all levels became empowered to discuss the literature they read in a constructive way. They no longer "looked for the right answer." Instead, they read their books, and they came to class ready to discuss their views and to listen to the views of others. Sometimes they argued and sometimes they disagreed, much the way people do when they talk about books.

The most obvious questions are: How was it possible to provide such individualized work in such a large class? How could I maintain order with some of the "characters" that were in my class? The answer is simple: These were seniors who knew that the class was overcrowded, and I used this knowledge to my advantage. I put them on notice that since the class was large, if, at any time, I felt that they were contributing negatively to the progress of the class, they were out. And since I had had a number of them in other classes prior to this one, they knew that I meant it. As any teacher knows, students--"low ability" students, very bright students with "less than mature" behavior, and "above average" students—almost always rise to the occasion. Besides, they liked what they were doing!

Another suggestion is to make friends with the library clerk. I know I drove our librarian crazy. Every week I came into her office with requests like "I need three *To Kill a Mockingbirds*, six *Future Shocks*, and one *Invisible Man*. I'm returning one *Catcher in the Rye*, two *Far from the Madding Crowds*, and one *Durango Street*."

My major goal for the class was to give students the opportunity to develop a love for literature, a love they could take with them when they graduated. I wanted them to pick up a book at a bookstand some day, even though they were not required to read it. Given student responses at the end of the term, I believe that many of them did develop more positive attitudes about reading. Though they did not like all of the books, almost all of them said that at least some of the reading had been enjoyable. Almost all said that they were glad they had had the opportunity to read in this way.

## INTEGRATING PERSONAL AND LITERARY RESPONSE

by Rick Chambers
Grand River Collegiate Institute
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

A unit on mythology has always been included as a part of our untracked grade 9 English course—mostly Greek and Roman material. I had always conducted this part of the course as a "read-the-stories; answer-the-questions; do-the-project" type of unit. Last year, I thought I'd try a different approach.

**Demeter and Persephone**

One of the first stories we did was Demeter and Persephone. The students read the story for homework. In class the next day, they worked in groups of three, telling each other the story from three different points of view. The first person had to tell it from Demeter's point of view (the distraught mother); the second had to tell the same story from Persephone's point of view (the helpless victim); the third had to tell it from Hades' point of view (the ogre's point of view). The students first decided who would be who, and then they settled down to tell their stories, taking on the personalities and adding important little character details ("It wasn't my fault, Mom, honest!" and "Hey, Zeus, stay outta this, O.K.?"). Afterward, in the interest of academic pursuits, my students wrote a short account of the story in their notebooks from a detached, third-person narrator's point of view.

We hurried through some other stories in a more traditional way, with students reporting to the class about the extra-marital pursuits and birth traumas of several gods and goddesses.

**Orpheus and Eurydice**

Then, we came to Orpheus and Eurydice. This time, after the students had read the story for homework, they came to class and were divided into pairs, one boy and one girl. The boy told the story from Orpheus' point of view, and the girl told the story from Eurydice's point of view. Afterward, each student wrote a newspaper account of the incident—headline, inverted triangle organization, 5 W's, and all that.

At the end of this unit on mythology, a short quiz was administered. In the past, responses had been more than predictable. This time, the responses were not. The weakest students in the class knew the stories of Demeter and Persephone and Orpheus and Eurydice backwards and forwards. The rest of the material was shaky at best, but, in fact, no different than it had been in other years.

What did I learn? Students need to make the information their own. They need the time to internalize and understand it, and then every student succeeds.

**Gatsby and the Angel**

A teacher of a senior English class conducted a similar experiment, but on a grander scale. *The Great Gatsby* was the novel assigned for intensive study in the advanced-level senior class. My colleague taught the material in a traditional, Socratic, chapter-by-chapter method. The students did not seem overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the material, but were good sports about the whole thing as students usually are, and did all of their work with a minimum of complaint. After all, this was the way they expected English to be taught.

In the latter half of the term, there was time left to study another novel. This time, the teacher had selected *The Stone Angel*, by the Canadian writer Margaret Laurence. Instead of studying this novel in a traditional way, the teacher asked the students to keep a reader-response journal which would be checked periodically.

At the end of each chapter, students were asked to record their thoughts about events, characters, style, settings, moods, or anything else that occurred to them in the course of reading the novel. Sometimes there were teacher-directed questions to address, but most of the time, the students were free to express their own ideas.

All the completed journals were eventually submitted to be read, though the students highlighted four or five entries that they were particularly interested in having read for evaluation. At the same time, class and group discussions were held concerning ideas that arose from the novel.

The examination given at the end of the term was telling: on the exam, students could choose to write about either *The Great Gatsby* or *The Stone Angel*. More than 90 percent of the students chose to write about *The Stone Angel*, and they responded to the literary essay question with authority and carefully developed organization. What is more, the majority of the answers were well written, reflecting a mature understanding and appreciation of the novel.

Did we conclude that *The Stone Angel* is easier to understand than *The Great Gatsby?* No. In both a freshman and a senior class, units taught using this approach revealed a significantly better understanding of the material by the students. This study in teaching technique revealed to the teacher in question, and to the rest of us by extension, that when writing about literature in a personal way, students make the material their own. Students begin to understand the material better, and once they understand it, the other aspects of a literary study fall into place.

Another aspect of this is that it takes the teacher off stage and into the audience. The teacher coaches, answers questions, prompts directions, suggests alternatives, and opens doors of inquiry for students. Instead of teachers telling students information that the teacher already knows, students are able to voice information that they are seeing perhaps for the first time, and by writing it down, they are sharing it with others, receiving responses, and ultimately, learning the material. Integrating this approach into a teacher's repertoire of teaching methods would certainly appear to be a good idea.

## THE BOOK OR THE MOVIE?

by Janine Rider
Mesa State College, Colorado

Any lifelong reader knows the answer to the question, "Which is better—the book or the movie?" The book is always better. Some of us will not even see the movie versions of books we enjoyed, or else if we see them, we will spend the next week criticizing them publicly. However, our students would not necessarily share this judgment; many would choose to head quickly to the movies rather than curl up with a book. As a mother of three school-aged kids, I always wince when movies seem to replace the written word. I ask my high school junior, "What are you reading now in American Lit?" "Nothing much," he responds. "We've seen a lot of movies, though." I cringe. Yet, I have found in teaching Introduction to Literature to college students that one of my most successful assignments revolves around a movie. It doesn't replace the reading; it supplements it.

I use Margaret Atwood's novel, *The Handmaid's Tale*, a futuristic story of a woman, Offred, living in Gilead, a repressed society where sterility is the norm, who is forced into service to a government official and his wife for the purpose of having his baby. The fast-paced novel works well in class because it deals with issues to which students can relate: the destruction of the environment, the fear of a conservative government takeover, and infertility. It is also a book about language, much the way George Orwell's *1984* is a book about language: From the moment readers learn that the heroine, Offred, has lost her own name and has been given a name signifying possession ("Of" ) of the man who keeps her ("Fred" ), we see how language affects thought in the controlled world of Gilead.

The movie version of the novel was not a box-office smash, but it is a fairly true depiction of the events and mood of the book. In some cases, the movie even brings the horror closer to home as viewers see everyday places and things—a school gymnasium, school buses—used for subverted purposes. In the movie we are told that the real name of the main character, Offred, the handmaid, is Kate; we never know it in the book. When we read we imagine how the other important characters look and react—the Commander, with whom Offred lives, and his chauffeur Nick, with whom she becomes secretly involved. The movie does the casting and directing for us. My final exam question—"Which is better, the book or the movie?"—sparks some of the most interesting responses of the semester. Explicit in my students' responses is a real understanding of the particular strengths and weaknesses of each medium as well as a critical judgment about some of the traditional elements of literature—plot, character, theme, or style. Without being specifically directed to think about these elements, students tend to see them as issues to address in their assessment of both the book and the movie. Further, the student responses convince me that there may be room for reading in the lives of even the most dedicated video kids.

By way of evidence, I offer some selected excerpts from the exam papers of my students. Their words are the best indication of their analytic and evaluative thinking. Although their answers covered a wide range of ideas, those included here speak to characterization, to the difference in the endings of the novel and the movie, and to an overall assessment of the two.

### Characterization

Here is what some members of the class thought about characterization in the book and the movie:

One student, Kristian, wrote, "The most valuable asset to the novel over the movie as a medium is its ability to describe the feelings, ideas, and emotions of the characters. We as humans are enthralled by the thoughts and feelings of others. We always want to know what others are thinking and feeling. If this were not true, there would be no Hallmark Cards and no soap operas. The ability of a novel to include the exact thinking process of the characters and their subsequent emotional response is what prevents us from putting a book down. By reading the thoughts of another person, we are able to try on their life and feel their pain. In a movie, all we can do is sit helplessly as we watch the world crumble around the seemingly unthinking character. In this respect the movie falls short in that we never were able to get into the frustrated, desiring mind of Offred. For the book, the thoughts of Offred were our only clue to the world of the handmaid and her mental world inside that of her physical one."

Another student, Nick, wrote, "Atwood's main character, Offred, is a seemingly unknowing lass who was swept into this infant republic of Gilead, over her head, and scared of what will come next. When viewing the movie version of this novel, however, one cannot help but be impressed by her boldness. . . . This difference leads the reader/viewer to the conclusion that the movie seems rather far-fetched. It is said that prison will harden a heart. However, how could the movie Offred be such a "tough" person, having so recently entered this "brave new world"? Which is to say that in the movie, this is her first house; a contrast to the book that names the Commander's house as her third assignment. If anything, it seems that in the book she should be more forthright, having been around the block a few times."

### The Ending

At the end of the book, Offred is swept away in an official van after being caught with the Commander at an inappropriate time. We think she is being secretly swept to safety, but we do not know for sure. The movie, however, ends with her killing the Commander, and, pregnant with Nick's baby, being taken away and hidden from the government. Here is what some members of the class thought about the difference in the ways that the book and the movie ended:

Susan said, "The movie has a much more violent ending than the book. The death of the Commander, Offred's part in his murder, and her pregnancy are 'Hollywood.' Atwood did not need these elements to bring the book to an end."

Cathy wrote, "I have to say that I liked the ending in the movie better. I'm not condoning murder or violence, but sometimes there is a believable aspect in revenge. When your family has been taken away from you, and you don't know if they are dead or alive, and you have been totally dehumanized and exploited, revenge would be a real emotion. I feel like in the movie, Offred got her revenge, got closure, and maybe was able to continue on with a life of some sort. The ending in the book left me wanting more."

Nick commented, "The novel seems to . . . leave the ending up to the reader. Although no story ever ends, this one answers no questions about Offred's fate. Even with the help of the historical notes, the reader is still left with many questions regarding the characters. First of all, did Offred get away at all? And if she did, was Nick really helping her, or was he an "eye," and she just found a way to shake him and get away on her own? Probably the biggest question that could be raised from the book on this subject is: If she got away, why did her story end where it did? If she survived, wouldn't it make sense, for historical purposes (which we must assume was her intention all along), to explain that she did in fact get away all right?

"This sort of enjoyable [questioning] is stolen from someone who just chooses to watch the movie. About the only question a moviegoer is left with is, What did she eat way out there?"

### Which Is Better?

Here is what students said generally about which experience they preferred: Heather wrote, "Basically I like the book better because it was in more detail and I seemed to get a better understanding of what was going on in the story. The movie has advantages too, such as it is much shorter and the audience can see what everything and everyone looks like. [On the other hand, watching a movie] does not let the reader create an image of what the characters look like or how the town looks. It almost seems to be like cheating yourself because you don't allow your mind to be creative."

Nikki felt the book was better, "I think we as readers are held captive by the truth in Atwood's writing. We feel pity and sympathy for Offred, but the reality of what is happening is what really scares us. Many of the things that Atwood wrote about are already true, and much of it doesn't seem too far away. . . . I form my own pictures in my mind of how things look and the way different people act—movies are just never as satisfying to me."

Bill preferred the movie, "They are such different mediums that both seem to have their good and bad points. The book went into more detail than did the movie, yet the visual element of the movie was more effective at coaxing an emotion. . . . Overall I felt that the *feel* of the book was somewhat restrained, while the movie was more forthright and accessible.

"I have never before read a book and then watched the movie, and not preferred the book to the movie. But I was just really taken in by the powerful imagery. I guess there is a first time for everything."

**Conclusion**

In the worlds of many of our students, stories come most often through the ear, in amplified Dolby™ surround-sound, and through the eye, in technicolor pictures. The stories in books come through the eye alone, in cold print. These are big differences, ones that turn many students away from books and the schoolish pursuits associated with them. My literature assignment seems to help students weigh those differences and appreciate the value of each medium. Even dedicated video kids see that a novel can entertain, though in a different way than a movie.

The big question, of course, is this: Will students choose to read more? Well—maybe. Certainly experiences like the ones we have in class will not turn video kids into readers who scorn movies, but it may make them moviegoers who can also enjoy the experience of the written word. They seem to see, often for the first time, that reading a novel can be another form of entertainment, that watching a movie is merely another way of "reading" a story, and that both are ways of interpreting life.

## TURNING SHORT STORIES INTO READERS' THEATER

by Gerald Grunska
formerly Highland Park High School, Illinois

Several years ago in the school where I taught, I took my literature class into a nearby park where students in a drama class gave outdoor "renderings" for my students. I remember two of the drama students enacting Edward Albee's "The Zoo Story" at a park bench, while my class stood around or sat on the ground. The next day we moved to the playground area of the park where several other drama students performed Albee's "Sandbox," taking advantage of the real play pit. Later, this same class of drama students adapted a J. D. Salinger short story, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," for a classroom "performance" in readers' theater style.

In readers' theater, instead of memorizing the lines and putting on an actual "play," the participants may stand before the class and give what amounts to a reading. This means not having to face one another to recite, not having to use gestures—other than realistic facial expressions—doing without props, and not having to block out movements. They just stand and deliver the lines, with vividness.

I put the words "rendering" and "performance" in quotations because transforming stories into readers' theater can have a special impact on both participants and audience. They see how nuances of character are revealed through an author's careful drawing of dialogue and images.

The stories and plays the drama class chose worked especially well to make literature come alive because, first of all, they were relatively brief and could readily fit into the time frame of an ordinary class. Secondly, they featured only a few characters, which meant a small audience could focus on the characters, and that, since the need for space was minimal, the performance could be observed in a casual, almost cloistered area. Consider serving portions of a novel, such as *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* or *To Kill a Mockingbird,* as readers' theater or making short stories or portions of longer works into mini-dramas. You might also consider poems for stand-up dramas, although these may require more skilled readers.

The effect of readers' theater can be a bit haunting, like watching Emily in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* returning from the afterlife and talking to her folks. Another tactic can be borrowed from Wilder's play to serve as the "glue" to hold a short story together when turning it into "live" readers' theater: A narrator or stage manager can read the descriptive parts, while the "actors" confine themselves to the dialogue.

The first person form of storytelling is the key. All a story might need to work well as a drama would be a winnowing of some lines, a decision about how the narrator is to function, and an opportunity for participants to go off somewhere and rehearse. My experience is that a class discussion about a story can take on a special aura if students actually see and hear it in dramatic form. In fact, the readers' theater performers are often the best ones to lead the discussion, just as real actors do on occasion from the stage after a play.

Students do not have to be the only ones allowed to perform. Our drama teacher performed Marjory Kinnan Rawlings' "A Mother in Manville" with a fellow instructor, which in turn stimulated another group of teachers to perform a selection from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest.* Some of those instructors will forever be known in their students' memories as Jack and Algernon and Cecily and Lady Bracknell.

Try it. A story often gains new dimensions in the telling. The tradition, of course, is as venerable as Homer.

**Appendix**

Here are some stories that work well in dramatization. A resourceful instructor can undoubtedly think of more.

| | |
|---|---|
| "Poker Night" | John Updike |
| "Impulse" | Conrad Aiken |
| "A Bottle of Milk for Mother" | Nelson Algren |
| "Use of Force" | William Carlos Williams |
| "Haircut" | Ring Lardner |
| "The Catbird Seat" | James Thurber |
| "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" | James Thurber |
| "The Lottery" | Shirley Jackson |
| "Charles" | Shirley Jackson |
| "Marriage à la Mode" | Katherine Mansfield |
| "The Open Window" | Saki |
| "The Sojourner" | Carson McCullers |
| "The Eighty-Yard Run" | Irwin Shaw |
| "Flight" | John Steinbeck |
| "A Red Letter Day" | Elizabeth Taylor |

## THE DAY THE TEXTBOOK EVALUATORS CAME TO TOWN

by Beverly Haley

**The Language Works**

It was October 1985, Fort Morgan, Colorado. Their fliers had appeared out of nowhere a couple of weeks earlier. The headline read, "Mommy—Guess What We Learned in School Today?" The answers to the question were provided below:

- How to write a suicide note
- Which contraceptive to use when I have sex with my boyfriend
- Why abortion is better than adoption
- Why it is sometimes OK to lie or steal
- We filled out questionnaires asking about

—my sex habits
—my parents' attitudes
—my secret thoughts

It was already 6:30 p.m., time for the day-and-a-half Educational Awareness conference to begin, and I was running late. Positioning my parked car for a quick exit and walking toward the small church where the meeting was to be held, I felt awfully alone. I wondered who would be there and whether I would know anyone. The speakers who were promised included the regional director of the U.S. Department of Education, a member of a local school board, and a minister, but the speaker who drew me to the ticketed conference was Mrs. Norma Gabler, well-known author and textbook evaluator.

Entering the building, I saw that the small foyer was almost completely taken up by a registration desk and a narrow table spread with pamphlets and books. The registration checks were to be payable to Morgan County Concerned Parents, but I hadn't preregistered. I didn't want to sign my name on anything, and I hated donating money to their cause. Nevertheless, I was there to see what they were up to, so I shoved eight dollars into the registrar's hand and took a name tag that would admit me into the conference.

Stepping toward the sanctuary, I glanced at the titles of the publications on display, planning to pick some up on the way out. I worried about whether there would be any places left in this tiny building, and I had hoped that I could just slip inconspicuously into a back corner. Inside, I was surprised to see only scattered groups of two's and three's. Most conspicuous was the newspaper reporter in the back row, center aisle—pad, pencil, and camera poised. A woman I had known for years—whose son and daughter I had taught in both junior and senior high school, herself a former public school teacher who left to start her own Christian school—greeted me heartily. "So glad you're here, Beverly"; her hand gripped mine. "Of course, you're planning to be with us again tomorrow, aren't you?" (Later I learned that this woman had clipped and saved selected newspaper columns I'd written years earlier, notably one discussing seniors being taught a unit on "death" in a social problems class, and she had given the articles to the Gablers as examples of things the schools shouldn't be teaching.) My eyes lit with relief as I spotted two school secretaries, friends, and I quickly planted myself beside them. The three of us looked around, trying not to stare, trying to determine who were on "our side" and who were on "theirs." I turned to speak with a young mother, an acquaintance I had liked and respected but who, instinct told me, was on "their" side. We made small talk, both careful of our words.

I wondered if other people would show up; with all the publicity, I had assumed the place would be standing-room only. Slowly other people trickled in, eventually totalling 90 (though that number shrank to 70 the following day). Many were there for the same reason I was—to become informed. Some came from smaller outlying communities, each with a specific gripe about a particular school board. About a dozen on the program were national and regional speakers (I tried to identify Mrs. Gabler among the local organizers). Only a few appeared to be parents who had allied themselves with the sponsoring groups—the Morgan County Concerned Parents Association and the Concerned Citizens for Quality Education in Morgan County, a group that regularly circulated petitions, ran newspaper ads, wrote letters-to-the-editor, and appeared at board meetings to protest against education texts and curriculum.

At last, more than an hour behind schedule, the woman who had greeted me earlier approached the podium, led the audience in reciting the pledge of allegiance to the flag, and then offered a prayer. Her prayer emphasized that parents should take responsibility for what their children were taught, offered sympathy to those teachers present, and asked the press to report what would be said at the conference with accuracy. Then she offered information about each scheduled speaker: Norma Gabler, noted author and textbook evaluator; Bill Jack of the Caleb Campaign Ministry; Tom Tancredo of the U.S. Department of Education; Frank Meyer, representing the National Association of Christian Educators and Citizens for Excellence in Education; Jayne Schindler, the Eagle Forum; and the night's main speaker, Carol Belt, a board of education member from a Denver suburb who refers to herself as a "religious fanatic."

Throughout the three-hour session, I experienced an eerie sense of unreality, almost as if I'd stepped inside some science-fiction story. Was this actually happening, I wondered, in our sleepy little community in the "boonies"? Who or what was really behind this movement? Standing before me were strangers—though I'd seen Mrs. Gabler on television and read of her activities with her husband, Mel. Now Norma Gabler and her friends told us that we were a "community torn apart," that we were "people who hurt," who were "desperate." None of the speakers, however, addressed local concerns; all spoke of broad, national situations. Looking at the small numbers of those in the protesting groups, I wondered, how many of us were "hurting"?

What motives, I questioned silently, did these people have—both the outsiders and the locals? What was their agenda? Why would they spend their money and invest their time here? Why now? Was our community one small link in an intricate network of planned eruptions?

Since almost no dialogue took place between speakers and audience, I tried to get some sort of overview from what the speakers said. Here are some of my perceptions.

What gospel do these groups preach?

Many of the precepts advocated were ones we all embrace, ones we have no argument against. For example:

- Parents should take responsibility for their children's schooling; they should become informed about what is taught.
- Parents should communicate with teachers and the schools as well as with the general public.
- Parents should get involved in the schools through parent groups, accountability and other committees, and participation at school board meetings or as board members.
- Children should learn to read, write, and do basic arithmetic effectively (and, they add, should not be passed to another grade level until they have mastered what they should).
- All of us should exhibit brotherly love and work together in a loving way.
- Students should be informed about our nation and the basic values on which it is founded.
- Parents, not the state or the school, "own" their children. (Does this mean that they have the right to make judgments for them—or what?)

While such groups and individuals preach beliefs that hardly anyone would question, they contradicted themselves by objecting to the teaching of topics in public schools such as:

- Global studies, which they attack as being communistic. Did brotherly love get lost somewhere?
- The humanities. To them, the term is synonymous with secular humanism.

- Sex education and death (including abortion and suicide), topics that, according to these groups, should be taught at home or in church or not at all. If they're taught such things, the argument goes, they're sure to go out, have sex, and commit suicide.
- Equal rights for women. Men, they say, should lead; women obey.
- Critical thinking. This topic encourages children, according to these groups, to be disobedient, to act disrespectfully toward adults and authority, and to rebel against established values and practices.
- World peace through nonviolent means. The Gablers' way of thinking advocates strength and power through armament.

What tactics do they use?

- Sensationalizing by appealing to emotions such as those held toward parenthood, freedom, America, and God.
- Distributing propaganda literature claiming that parents "have been squeezed out of their children's education" (parental rights violated), made to feel like second-class citizens, told that schools teach everything but the "basics" (i.e., phonics, facts, reading, writing, and arithmetic); that today's high school and even college graduates can not read, write, or compute.
- Circulating petitions against textbooks and curricula, again using emotional appeals and fear tactics.
- Organizing. They believe that only 3 percent of the population determines the direction we take in this country. They intend to be in that 3 percent.
- Practicing persistence, patience, single-mindedness, and smiling in the face of the "enemy" (i.e., the secular humanists).
- Making themselves highly visible through media attention. In our town, they got front page stories, dozens of ads and letters-to-the-editor, a radio talk show, and attention from state and regional media.
- Continuously questioning and challenging what schools are teaching.
- Placing their followers in key positions of power, such as becoming school board members and lobbying at the state level.
- Working within the system to infiltrate and change it.

What did they accomplish in our town in a seemingly short time?

- Attracted wide attention.
- Divided the citizens of this community.
- Created fear in the hearts of parents and teachers and school administrators.
- Blocked the adoption of updated health education materials as well as forced the shelving of much of the material that had been used for the past eight years—and intimidated teachers about teaching certain topics.

Did anything on the positive side happen?

- Raised awareness on the part of the school and general community about the activities of these groups and made us all realize that, yes, it could happen here.
- Forced the educational community to formulate policy statements as well as to generate tactics for counteracting those of the "evaluators." (How about the Doublespeak Award for the Gablers?)
- Served as a warning to be alert and prepared to justify educational policies.
- Made the community in general and school personnel in particular re-evaluate texts and curriculum for fairness, truth, and completeness.
- Helped schools to take a closer look at how we communicate with parents and the public (or fail to).

Pondering the experience, I returned home feeling frustrated, outraged, and shaken. I found you cannot argue with such persons. They accuse school officials of not having open minds and of not listening, yet close their own minds and remain deaf to opinions, views, or values different from their own. Suddenly, too, I regarded my neighbors with suspicion rather than trust. Where would all this lead? What would happen next? Are we, the silent majority, willing to spend the amounts of time, money, and effort equal to what the Gablers and those in their camp spend? Or will we remain complacent in the belief that we are in the right and that right will emerge victorious?

I recalled what Norma Gabler said of herself earlier that evening: "I am either a saint or a devil." And though the night was warm, a shiver spasmed down my spine.

### Appendix

This is a partial list of handouts that were available at the conference. Books were also on sale, such as those written by the Gablers.

Titles from the Pro Family Forum, headquartered in Fort Worth, Texas:

"How Are the Churches Being Indoctrinated with Secular Feminism?"

"Education's Trojan Horse—The Paideis Proposal: An Educational Manifesto"

"Is Humanism Molesting Your Child?"

"Are Your Children Being Exposed to These X-Rated Children's Books in Shopping Malls, Public and School Libraries?"

"Dungeons and Dragons, Only a Game?"

"Euthanasia: 'Good Death' or Selective Killing?"

"NEA's Choices—or How to Indoctrinate Students in Ten Easy Lessons"

*High Frontier*, a pamphlet on nuclear armament by General Daniel O. Graham, P.O. Box 37053, Washington, DC 20013

"What in the World's Going On in Your School?" by Vox Pop, Ran Rankin, Publisher, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho.

"How and Why I Taught My Children to Read," *The Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Alton, Illinois.

Mel and Norma Gabler, "Humanism in Textbooks (Secular Religion in the Classroom)"

"School-based Teen-Clinics" (information on contraceptives, AIDS, and the like), material collected by The Eagle Forum, Northern Illinois.

# SOFTWARE REVIEW

## DAEDALUS INTEGRATED WRITING ENVIRONMENT

by Connie Fleeger
Karns City High School, Pennsylvania

As computers become more popular in education, teachers are discovering that computers can help their students with invention, prewriting, drafting the paper, editing, and revision. As in many other fields, educators must explore and evaluate the software packages available for computers to be used to their full potential.

Although copyright information and cost are of concern when choosing a software package, the judicious educator must ask: "Will this program really help my students with their writing? And if so, how?"

I chose to research the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment software program to determine whether it achieves the goal of helping students improve their writing. The Integrated Writing Environment contains programs for network-based activities, however I only reviewed the stand-alone modules of the package. The program was examined for accessibility, intelligibility, and clarity of direction. Since teachers must often choose their software before presenting it in class, I decided to try the program myself.

The first file examined on the disk was Daedalus Invent, written to help the writer explore his or her own ideas about the topic chosen to write about. Daedalus Invent uses a set of "invention heuristics" in the form of questions to help the writer better explore the topic.

The Daedalus Invent program is based on three different rhetorical theories: Aristotle's, Kenneth Burke's, and Young, Becker, and Pike's. The student has a choice of which invention technique he or she wishes to pursue.

Since each file is intended for use after a topic has been chosen, I used brainstorming to find a topic. My brainstorming led me to "Equitable Funding in Public Education" as a research topic. Each file asks the writer for a topic and a thesis statement. After these are entered, the programs ask specific questions about the topic. The "Aristotle Topoi," the first file I examined, consists of ten questions that the student answers about his or her topic of research. The first frame prompted me to write five or six lines about my topic, and the second asked for a tentative thesis statement. Both of these questions forced me to focus in on funding for public education and to find statements to support my thesis. The third question asked me to choose three or four words that described my topic. These words were then accepted as a tentative title. The program then asked me specific questions about my topic. The first prompt asked me to define my subject, and the second instructed me to take each word of my title and define it, and to give the connotations and denotations of the words. I defined Equal Funding in Public Education and wrote what these words meant to me. I was then asked to divide my topic into three subtopics and decide which could be discussed separately. The subtopics I chose were: state and local taxation, the connection between a quality education and the amount of money spent per child, and the discrepancies in teacher salaries. The program also asked me which facts about my subject I was unlikely to know, any contradictions, and what objects I associated with it.

Overall, I found Aristotle's Topoi to be very helpful. After I had decided on a topic, but before using the program, I had attempted to write an essay; however, I had a difficult time generating ideas. Yet after using "Aristotle's Topoi" for a half hour, I had a definite idea of what I wanted to research and how to approach the topic.

Admittedly, prewriting techniques can easily be used in the classroom without the aid of a computer program, but brainstorming helped me to discover a topic of interest. I found this program to be useful because it forced me as a writer to focus on my topic and open up new possibilities for exploration of any given topic. It is also "user friendly" in that the instructions are concise and easily understood.

While I can visualize using "Aristotle's Topoi" in the classroom, I cannot say the same for "Burke's Pentad." Burke's Pentad is to encourage the writer to think about a subject from five different perspectives and to see relationships among the perspectives, which he calls "ratios." These include:

| | |
|---|---|
| Scene: | Where and when something happens |
| Act: | What happens |
| Agent: | Who causes what happens to happen |
| Agency: | By what means something happens |
| Purpose: | Why something happens |

The first prompt asked for the subject of my paper; I typed in "Equality in Public School Funding." I was then asked, "What is the setting for (Equality in Public School Funding)?" and I immediately became confused. Since the menu offers an "explanation" of the question, I asked for one and received the following explanation of the question: "I'm thinking about specific locations for your subject. These locations may be physical or mental, natural or unnatural. For example, if I were writing about the arms race, it would be interesting to consider the diplomatic locations, the strategic military locations, or even the historical locations." Needless to say, I was still confused. Should I answer, "The public schools," "The United States," or "Pennsylvania"? Or, is the "location" in the mind-set of those who complain about school funding but see no need to make changes? I chose Pennsylvania just to see where the next prompt would lead me.

The second prompt asked, "What particulars of the setting influence (Equal Funding of Public Schools)?" Since I was confused about the actual setting of my topic, this question was also unclear. Once again, I chose "explanation" to help me better understand the question. I was given the following explanation of the question: "Sometimes a specific feature of the setting has more importance. That is, it seems to stand out. If you were describing space, that feature might be the solitude, or perhaps the silence. Does your subject have such an important feature in its setting? Explain."

After reading this explanation, I realized that my subject didn't really fit the prompts, and perhaps this program is designed for a descriptive essay rather than a persuasive one. However, even if I were describing the problems of funding in public education, I am not sure that such an in-depth study of the setting would be appropriate.

The remainder of the prompts continued asking about setting. For example, prompt #3 asked "Is the setting around (Equal Funding in Public Education) unique? What makes it so?" It was not until prompt 9 (out of 10) that I was asked, "What happens in (Equal Funding in Public Education)?" and prompt 10 asked, "What causes (Equal Funding in Public Education)?"

Needless to say, I found this program to be confusing and unsuitable to my purposes. As a fairly experienced writer, I found that I was focusing more on trying to understand the program and its line of questioning than I was on my research topic. As I was not totally familiar with Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory, I was unsure of what the questions meant and how I should answer them. I believe that Burke's Pentad would be of use in the classroom only after the writer and instructor were familiar with his theory. My experience was, to say the least, unproductive. I felt that my time was wasted attempting to answer questions that had no bearing on my subject.

The next program I examined was the "Tagmemic Matrix." According to the instructions, "the tagmemic matrix encourages a writer to think about a topic from nine perspectives . . . but this program will ask you questions from only three perspectives." These perspectives are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Particle: | viewing a subject in itself |
| Wave: | viewing a subject as it changes |

Field: viewing a subject's relationship to other subjects (in a system)

Like the other programs, the Tagmemic Matrix asks the writer for a subject and a thesis statement. The first prompt asks: "What makes (Equal Funding in Education)?" I found this question to be helpful because it forced me to search for a solution to the problem of educational funding. The next prompt asked, "Is (Equal Funding in Education) best arranged by space, time, or class?" I was unsure of how to answer this question so I moved on to the next prompt, which asked, "What features of (Equal Funding in Education) change over time?" Of course, my answer was "none."

As I moved though the prompts, I noticed that the questions became more and more abstract. For example, prompt #5 asked, "View (Equal Funding in Education) as an abstract, multidimensional system. What does this perspective suggest?" I believe that this question would be extremely difficult for a student writer to answer without the help of an instructor who would have to define "multidimensional systems" and give several examples. If the program requires too many explanations, it may not be helpful to the student.

This program helped me in limited ways. After completing the prompts, I realized that my topic would be more effective if it were changed to "Unequal Funding in Education." This would give me the opportunity to describe the problems with the current system and to offer a solution.

All in all, the questions in Tagmemic Matrix do not require the thought that those in Aristotle's Topoi do. Many require only a yes or no answer, and the vocabulary is much more advanced than is necessary. While Aristotle's Topoi forced me to delve into my subject and discover new ideas to write about, the Tagmemic Matrix and Burke's Pentad were of little help. For the student writer, both Burke's Pentad and Tagmemic Matrix may be more of a hindrance than a help. The student will probably spend more time trying to understand the questions than he or she will on the answer.

The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment also offers the Daedalus Respond program, which the authors define as a revision heuristic or a set of prompts that help the writer revise his or her own document or critique the document of another student. Descant's screen is divided into three parts: the middle part consists of the text being revised or critiqued, the bottom screen is a text editor, and the top of the screen asks specific questions about the text.

Daedalus Respond offers two types of revision: global and local. The global revision concentrates on the paper as a whole, while the local revision asks questions about specific areas of the paper. I found both revision files to be helpful.

The global revision file instructs the reader to look at content of the paper before examining and revising individual sentences. The global file asks:

- What do you like about the paper? What works well?
- How well do you think the writer keeps his or her readers in mind?
- How could he or she better communicate with the reader?
- Does the writer seem to have a clear purpose?
- What suggestions can you make about improving the purpose?
- How well does the paper focus on its topic?
- What suggestions can you make?
- What questions do you have about the paper?
- What more do you need to know?
- What examples might help?
- What specific suggestions do you have for improving the paper?

Obviously, the global revision focuses on content, audience, and purpose—all high order concerns. Although some of the questions could be answered with simple one-word answers, the majority require the reader to make constructive comments about the paper.

After the writer uses the global revision to determine purpose, audience, and focus, Daedalus Respond asks the user to look at the writer's style, use of effective examples, and the roles of specific paragraphs and sentences. The local revision file was specifically designed for this purpose.

Once again, the questions force the user to answer specific questions about the paper—questions that the average reader (or writer, for that matter) may neglect to ask him or herself. The local revision file asks:

- What is the main idea of this paper?
- How effective is the introduction? What could improve it?
- Does each paragraph act as an integral part of a unified presentation?
- How well has the writer organized the paper?
- What ideas, paragraphs, sentences need to be cut from the paper?
- Has the writer used effective documentation?
- How effective is the ending of the paper? What could be done to improve it?

One of the nicest features of this revision program is that the person doing the critique can look at the text on the computer screen while answering the questions. The reader can scroll up and down throughout the document without having to have a hard copy of the text.

I found the Daedalus Respond feature of the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment to be helpful and self-explanatory. Of course, this exercise could be accomplished without the computer, but the ability for the writer to receive a critique that is legible and immediate is an undeniably important factor in improving student writing.

Daedalus Respond can be put on a network or can simply be used from a disk. While the network is the optimal situation, saving files on disk can be effective and is certainly less expensive. If the school has a network, the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment contains files for users to give and receive messages. Networks provide immediate access to other writers' papers and opportunity for simultaneous peer interaction.

The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment also contains a word processing program called Daedalus Write. Since Daedalus Write only has options to print, block, and spell check, the beginning word processing user has very few commands to worry about. Of course, as the user becomes more comfortable with word processing, he or she will need a more sophisticated program; nevertheless, Daedalus Write should be adequate for the beginner. This user's only complaint about the Daedalus Write is that there are no on-screen instructions. When I tried to delete and move a sentence, I simply had to use trial and error in order to accomplish it. However, if the instructor provides each student with a copy of basic instructions, the students should have little problem with the program.

On the basis of my examination of the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment, I believe that the program has merit. Although I find some parts of the program to be more helpful than others, my overall impression is positive. Not only are many of the questions applicable to student writing, but, in my opinion, students who use this program may discover that computers are more than quiet typewriters. By using a computer to develop and extend ideas, students will hopefully become aware of how computers can make writing a little less painful.

I do feel, however, that this program is not suitable for everyone. Before using it, I would recommend that an instructor carefully consider the students' ages and writing abilities. Since this program is designed to help the student who knows what he or she wants to write about, the instructor should provide students with instruction in brainstorming, freewriting, and other techniques to help the student find a topic.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, I might have my students write an argument without the aid of the program, giving as much instruction as possible. Once the students understand a persuasive paper, I would make use of the program and attempt to determine whether it actually made a difference in the students' writing.

The Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment is not meant to take the place of a teacher; students need individual attention and direction from a caring instructor. Computer programs should be used only to enhance and extend classroom activities.

# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## QUARTERLY "BEST ARTICLE" AWARD

The Conference on English Leadership announced the recipient of its 1993 "Best Article" award for articles published in the *English Leadership Quarterly* during 1992. The award honors the author of the best article published in 1992, so chosen because of its value to the department chair, the quality of its writing, and the originality of what it said.

Carol Jago, a secondary English teacher at Santa Monica High School in California, won the award for her article, "No More Objective Tests, Ever," published in the February 1992 *ELQ*, an issue devoted to Evaluation and Assessment. In the article, Carol said, "Every time a teacher of literature gives an objective test, she undermines her students' confidence in themselves as readers. The very act of posing questions to which answers will be determined as right or wrong sends a message to students that their teacher is the source of all real information and power in a classroom. Unless this attitude is what we believe or want to encourage, we must abandon all such tests forever." To make her point, Carol included the response written by one of her tenth graders, Karen Montoya, when Carol asked them to write about a major character in *The Odyssey* who was most like them and to explain the similarity using examples from their own and the character's lives.

Carol was recognized and presented with a plaque during the CEL Luncheon at the NCTE Annual Convention in Pittsburgh.

Honorable mention went to finalists for the award: William Williams, "To Be Literate," Barbara King-Shaver, "Process-Based Literature/Writing Examinations," Drick Zirinsky, "Building a Community of Readers and Writers," Rob Perrin, "Metaphors from the Arts: Rethinking Contexts for Writing," and Joy Marks Gray, "When the Students Create the Questions."

The judging committee included Lela DeToye of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, Diana Dreyer of Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, Daniel Heller of Brattleboro Union High School in Vermont, and Louann Reid of Douglas County High School in Colorado.

## NEW EDITOR NAMED FOR *ENGLISH LEADERSHIP QUARTERLY*

Dr. Henry Kiernan, Humanities Supervisor for the Southern Regional High School District in Manahawkin, New Jersey, will take over the editorship of *ELQ* beginning with the October 1994 issue. Southern Regional is a 7–12 "receiving" district with 2,700 students and growing. As the district Humanities Supervisor, he is responsible for providing educational leadership, curriculum development, and supervision for 76 Art, English, Foreign Language, Reading, Social Studies, and English as a Second Language teachers. He is currently a co-editor of *The Docket*, the professional journal for the New Jersey Council for the Social Studies, and has been appointed to the National Task Force for History Standards, National Center for History in the Schools, University of California, Los Angeles. Henry has been a frequent presenter at CEL conferences as well as a frequent contributor to *ELQ*, having written "Research Paper Redux" for the May 1990 issue and "Portfolio Assessment: Students as Producers" for the February 1992 issue. Henry replaces current editor Jim Strickland, who has provided leadership for *ELQ* and its readers since October 1988.

## CALLS FOR MANUSCRIPTS—PLANS FOR FUTURE ISSUES

The *English Leadership Quarterly*, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5,000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary/secondary/college) where English is taught. Informal, firsthand accounts of successful department activities are always welcome.

Software reviews and book reviews related to the themes of the upcoming issues are encouraged.

Recent surveys of our readers reveal these topics of interest: leadership training for the new department chair, class size/class load, support from the business community, at-risk student programs, the tracking/grouping controversy, problems of rural schools, the value of tenure, and the whole language curriculum philosophy. Short articles on these and other concerns are published in every issue. In particular, upcoming issues will have these themes:

May 1994 (February 1 deadline):
**Best and the Brightest: Innovation and Teaching**

October 1994 (July 1 deadline):
**Case Studies in English Leadership**

December 1994 (September 15 deadline):
**English Standards**

February 1995 (November 1 deadline):
**Multicultural and Multi-Ethnic Literature**

May 1995 (February 1 deadline):
**Technology and the Teaching of English**

Manuscripts may be sent on 5.25- or 3.5-inch floppy disks, with IBM compatible ASCII files or as traditional double-spaced typed copy. Address articles and inquiries to: James Strickland, Editor (May 1994 issue only), *English Leadership Quarterly*, English Department, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 16057-1326; Henry Kiernan, Editor (beginning October 1994 issue), *English Leadership Quarterly*, Southern Regional High School District, 600 North Main Street, Manahawkin, New Jersey 08050, phone #609-597-9481, fax #609-978-5372.

## CEL ELECTION RESULTS

Winners of the CEL election were announced at the 1993 Annual Convention in Pittsburgh. Jeff Golub, University of South Florida, Tampa, and Bill Newby of Shaker Heights High School, Shaker Heights, Ohio, were elected Members-at-Large. Congratulations to the winners and thanks to all other candidates.

### CEL Executive Committee

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